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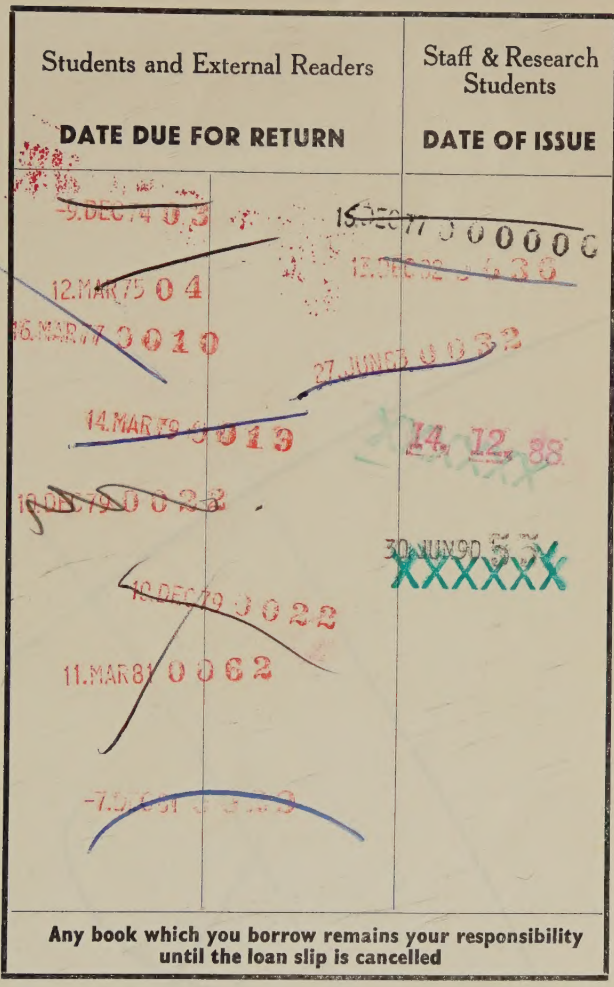

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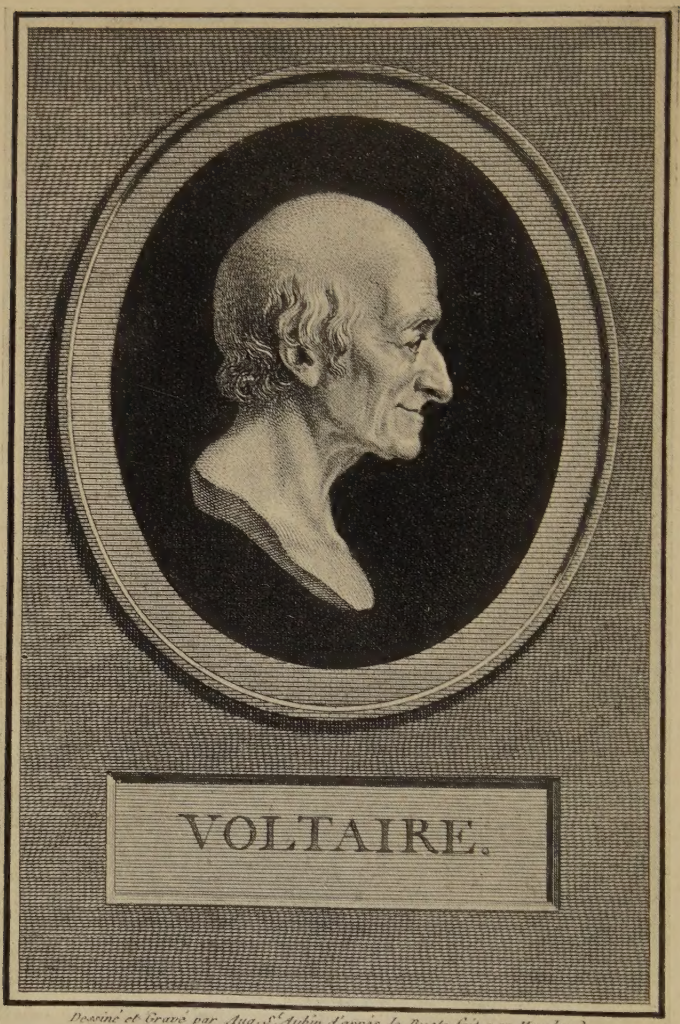
VOLTAIRE



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VOLTAIRE

By

C. E. VULLIAMY

Écrasez l'Infâme!

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" *Talent unique, le plus rare en un siècle classique, le plus précieux de tous, puisqu'il consiste à se représenter les êtres, non pas à travers le voile grisâtre des phrases générales, mais en eux-mêmes, tels qu'ils sont dans la nature et dans l'histoire, avec leur couleur et leur forme sensibles, avec leur saillie et leur relief individuels, avec leurs accessoires et leurs alentours dans le temps et dans l'espace, un paysan à sa charrue, un quaker dans sa congrégation, un baron allemand dans son château, des Hollandais, des Anglais, des Espagnols, des Italiens, des Français chez eux, une grande dame, une intrigante, des provinciaux, des soldats, et le reste du pêle-mêle humain, à tous les degrés de l'escalier social, chacun en racourci et dans la lumière fuyante d'un éclair.*"—TAINE, " Les Origines de la France Contemporaine."

PREFACE

WHEN Voltaire gave his patriarchal blessing to the grandson of Benjamin Franklin, he placed his hand on the boy's head with the words *God and Liberty*. The hazy deism which he professed made it difficult to know what he had in mind when he spoke of God, but there was never any doubt as to what he meant by liberty. He stood, as he stands now, for the free exercise and development of the human mind, and for the right of men to walk in the path of reason.

The influence of this extraordinary man was due not only to his printed works but also to the possession of strongly marked personal qualities. By a terrible concentration of energy and purpose, indifferently used to gratify some trivial spite or to strike a ringing blow for truth and humanity, he stamped himself in no uncertain way upon the picture of his times.

His true meaning is best revealed by the examination of his life. It is often obscured by a critical study of his writings ; and for this reason it has seemed proper to adopt a frankly biographical method. Full use has been made throughout this book of Voltaire's own letters, which are in themselves autobiographical material of the highest value, and are certainly among the most daring, the most brilliant and the most vivid letters which have ever been published. In every case, the author is responsible for the translation of these letters, and of other original texts, most of which have not previously been rendered into English. In the transcription of Voltaire's English letters, the original orthography is retained.

Every recent source of information has been drawn upon, and every important edition of Voltaire consulted, in the preparation of the present volume. No one can attempt a biography of Voltaire without being profoundly indebted to the great work of Desnoiresterres and to the critical and philosophic analyses of Lanson and of John Morley.

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CHAPTER I

THE TROUBLESOME YOUTH

THE old painters, when they drew the portrait of some illustrious person, used to surround him by the scenes or appliances of his calling. If he was a man of action, the accessories were few and simple. Behind the soldier you would see the cloudy battlefield with a line of threatening pikes ; while the admiral would point with a careless and shapely hand to the lively cannonadoes of his ships of war.

But when the portrait was that of a man of letters or learning, the machinery of the picture was more complex and more detailed ; you had instruments and diagrams, books, globes, apparatus of strange and bewildering appearance, classic temples, fragments of antiquity, all the curious and varied paraphernalia of science (half magical) or things purely symbolic.

It is the same with biographical portraiture. Of the soldier, we need only know that he was lucky or unlucky, triumphant or routed, in his battles ; with the sailor it is all a matter of weather-gage and broadside ; and it is unlikely that we shall be called upon, in either case, to admire subtlety or brilliance of an intellectual kind. Not so when the subject of biography is a man who has won for himself no mere victory of arms, no fugitive renown, but a lasting place in human thought and experience. His life cannot be fully expressed in simple terms of action, or even in simple terms of achievement. We cannot deal with him by a summary or categorical method. The picture, it seems, will be terribly overcrowded with a profusion of unfamiliar symbols. Delineation, however adroit, is not enough ; form and

feature, dress and accessories, even the visible signs of performance, cannot give us the whole meaning of the man—perhaps, indeed, they can give us only a very small part of that meaning. In his words, if they are faithfully recorded, in his letters, if they are carefully transcribed, in his gesture and movement, and in the adventures of his life, we find the real man.

It cannot now be maintained that Voltaire made any supremely important contribution to poetry or history, to science or philosophy, to art, polemics or drama. Yet it may be questioned whether any man has exercised a more prodigious influence over the trend of thought in civilised Europe. That influence was, and still is, largely personal. When we think of him, we think less of the great mass of his writings (and probably no man has ever written more) than of the fierce and copious energies which drove him so eagerly now in one direction and now in another, but which gave such a vital impulse to his teaching of humanity and justice. We are strongly attracted, or strongly repelled, by the amazing, insistent personality of this strange man. We pass, with some bewilderment, from the dull proficiency of the *Henriade*, the fine yet formal rhetoric of the tragedies, the unequal brilliance of histories, odes, fantasies, epistles, every imaginable kind of literary excursion and experiment, slight or voluminous, flippant or profound, to the scalding vehemence of the ripe Voltairean satire, in dialogue, verse and fable. We glance, in dismay, at the ninety-seven volumes of the first Baudouin edition, and with wondering respect at the labours of Bengesco. Here, God wot, is energy enough—a flood of energy, without its like in literature.

But Voltaire himself is still unaccountable. We shall

come nearer to knowing him, probably, if we try to understand the facts of his life ; and above all, if we read some of the many letters in which he is so clearly and so delightfully revealed.

The letters have the value, and often the character, of autobiography. Voltaire had no repressions. He took no pains to conceal what he felt and thought. In his letters he has drawn his own portrait with astounding vivacity and candour. And here, rather than in his books or collections, we find him most vividly and immediately presented to our minds, with all his force and fire and all his wayward pettiness, his touchy pride and fevered jealousies ; all the meanness and the greatness, the gnawing malice and flaming generosity of his extraordinary nature.

In his own statements concerning his age and the date of his birth, Voltaire was not consistent. His baptismal certificate is dated the 22nd of November, 1694, and according to this document he was born on the previous day. The assertion that he was born on the 20th of February, 1694 (though repeated by Condorcet, who should have been well informed, and once or twice affirmed by Voltaire himself), seems to have been due to a misunderstanding, to an obscure personal motive, or to a failure of memory.

His father, François Arouet, was a notary and a minor official, who, in 1696, obtained the post of receiver in the Chamber of Accounts. He possessed the estimable but inconspicuous qualities of industry and probity. Voltaire's mother, Marguerite Daumart, was a gentlewoman, evidently gay and attractive, who received occasionally in the bourgeois salon of the Arouets people of rank and fashion. She had borne four other children, two of whom had died in infancy. François-Marie

(who became Voltaire) had a brother, Armand, and a sister, Marguerite Catherine.

It seemed likely that François-Marie would not live. He was a frail and sickly child, expeditiously christened so that he might not perish in a state of natural sin. Indeed, he did die of extreme debility, eighty-four years later.

From his childhood, François-Marie showed an aptitude for letters and a striking gift of originality. At the age of three he could repeat verses learnt by heart. But his juvenile performances, however remarkable, were a proof of aptitude rather than of genius, and were not yet of a kind to make his father uneasy.

Arouet was one of those plain, sensible men who regard the practice of art or letters with a sort of dismay, and who believe that a man should seek both profit and security in the routine of an honourable profession, or even in the service of the state. Madame Arouet, who may not have agreed with this view, died when her youngest child was seven years old. The father, who was able to afford the most expensive education for young François-Marie, sent him, three years later, to the fashionable college of Louis-le-Grand. To this Jesuit college, pert little gentlemen, with little swords dangling under their skirts, came to be taught the humanities, and to learn, if they could, the principles of elegance, of good taste, and consequently of religion.

At Louis-le-Grand, young Arouet acquired that liking for aristocratic manners and aristocratic society which, in later life, made him sometimes a dupe and sometimes a mere flatterer. But he acquired something of far greater value. He was given a first-rate literary education. He was taught Latin by Thoulier and rhetoric by Father Porée—a man of high learning and

of delightful character. As far as François-Marie was concerned, no better, no more fitting education could have been chosen for him. His attainments were doubtless equally gratifying to his father and his masters. He acquired an extraordinary facility in the making of verses ; a facility by no means uncommon at that period, and sedulously cultivated by those with pretensions to elegance. He worked hard, won many prizes, and the good Jesuits, while admiring his exercises, were " struck by the audacity of his thoughts and the independence of his opinions."

Clearly, François-Marie was destined to become a man of letters. That was the last thing his father wished him to become : he wanted to make him a man of the law, a magistrate. Verses, tragedies, odes ; it was not by giving his thoughts to such easy trifles that a man could earn the respect of worthy people or reach the solid honours of a good appointment.

Young Arouet, for his part, cared nothing for such honours, and was painfully indifferent to the worthy people. He was a born verbalist, a born writer. From his earliest years he felt the desire to be famous and fashionable. Writing was easy, when there was no need to write for a living ; and, with an assured fortune, philosophy and poetry might become the most agreeable of pastimes. An extreme " independence of opinion " might be safely indulged, with a good chance of attracting notice, and—happy thought !—of galling the envious and pleasing the great. The boy was vain, ambitious and sensitive. He felt, no doubt, something of that inferiority which is commonly felt by those who are physically weak and at the same time deeply conscious of intellectual vigour. The assertion of that vigour becomes a prime necessity.

He was anxious, moreover, to assert himself in another way. He found himself placed in the higher ranks of the bourgeoisie, received and recognised with a patronising approval by persons of quality, but often reminded of his true level. He did not forget that his mother, Marguerite Daumart, had come of a noble family. It was not enough, therefore, to prove superiority of intellect; he would prove an equal superiority of birth and breeding.

And who was better fitted to launch the young man than his god-father, the naughty old Abbé de Chateauneuf, the friend of Ninon de Lenclos, his lips readier with a jolly trol-de-rol than with text or homily? The Abbé took his young god-son into the society of dukes and marquises—de Sully, de la Fare, the Abbé de Chaulieu, the Abbé Courtin. (He had introduced the boy, when he was thirteen, to Ninon herself, then in her eighty-fifth year, and still charming. She was mightily pleased with young Arouet, and left him a legacy of 2,000 livres, intended for the purchase of books.) More epigrams, more verses; *Amulius and Numitor*, the fragment of a tragedy. Old Arouet had now some cause for alarm.

In 1712, the Academy offered a prize for the best ode appropriate for the building of the choir of Notre-Dame by Louis XIV. Here was a chance. Young Arouet, who, if he was never a poet, had an amazing facility for rhyming lines, lost no time in writing an ode which began

> "The King of kings, whose mighty voice
> Has thundered in this place . . ."

And the ode was sent to the poet Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, who was pleased to say that it had "a great deal of

spirit." In 1714 the prize was duly awarded, not to young Arouet but to the Abbé Dujarry.

What !—a parasite, a poet by profession, a botcher of halting verses, a man who never wrote a good line or said a good thing in his life ! Arouet, his jangling pride roused to a pitch of angry dissonance, grinned with malice. In the same year, he produced two strangely nasty pieces—*Le Bourbier* (*The Swamp*), and *L'Anti-Giton*.

As time passed, the differences of opinion between François-Marie and his father led to a more or less complete estrangement. Nor should we too hastily condemn old Arouet. François-Marie was now approaching early manhood. He had no profession. He had only written a few poor trifles, and although he talked about tragedies he had not produced anything which could possibly be regarded as a work of genius. The precocity of his childhood, so it would seem, had meant nothing at all. A plague on de Chateauneuf !—turning the boy's head—what would be the end of it ? Instead of applying himself to the law, according to his father's wishes and the proper inclination of a worthy young fellow, there he was, giddy-gadding with a rout of licentious noblemen, jesting with impudent whores, and seeking by stale blasphemies to prove himself a man of wit.

He had been sent to the Hague, to live under the wing of the Ambassador (another de Chateauneuf) ; and there he had fallen in love with the pretty daughter of a terrible scandal-mongering mother, Madame Dunoyer—a dreadful creature who published a sort of gazette of infamy called the *Quintessence*. Informed of this by the mother herself, the Ambassador furiously sent him back to Paris.

The love-letters of François-Marie were duly published by Madame Dunoyer, and his father shut the door in his face. Then his friends intervened, and François-Marie was placed in the office of the attorney, Monsieur Alain. Vile drudgery! lightened only by the gay companionship of Thiériot, an airy, scatter-brain dog, but not lacking in loyalty of a doggish kind.

Louis XIV, the last fine figure of a king, died on the 1st of September, 1715. His death was followed by a general declaration of grievances and a general freedom of speech and manners. The spirit of the old monarchy seemed to have died with the king; and the people, quickly forgetting their devotion, quickly forgetting the royal splendour and the royal victories of Louis the Great, began to reckon the cost of splendours and victories, and to ask whether they had not good reason to complain of tyranny or indifference. Madame de Maintenon sought the obscurity of a voluntary exile. In spite of the good intentions, one might almost say the liberal policy, of the Regent (the Duke of Orleans), there was a widespread sense of uneasiness, not far removed, indeed, from actual mistrust. Gossips were busy; satires, lampoons, innuendoes and open libels had a free circulation.

François-Marie, when the king died, was in his twenty-first year. He had been removed from the notary's office through the kindly intervention of M. de Caumartin, one of his father's friends, and spent much of his time with this amiable old man at the château of Saint-Ange near Fontainebleau.

De Caumartin lived in the past. His mind was stored with memories of the old kings of France; he would talk with joy and a winning enthusiasm of their great deeds, and in particular of those of Henry IV.

It was not long before François-Marie, always captivated by enthusiasm, conceived the idea of writing a poem, a long poem, a poem to be hailed as the great national epic, with an idealised Henry IV as the hero. This poem was to be called *La Ligue*, *The League* ; it is better known to us now by its later title—*La Henriade*. But young Arouet did not foresee the peculiar and unfortunate circumstances in which a considerable part of his epic was to be written.

De Caumartin introduced his young friend to the elderly and debauched society of the Temple. Here he met the most incredibly wicked, witty and perverted old men, whose red, shining faces glowed in the steam of the heated room like the multiple suns of a drunkard's vision. All of them were cynics, voluptuaries, uproariously mocking virtue, authority, decency and religion. Most of them were churchmen, spending in a life of unrestrained indulgence the huge revenues which they drew from abbey or benefice. The Prince de Vendôme, Prior of France, and the Abbés Chaulieu and Debussy were chief among the presiding demons of the assembly. To them young François-Marie wrote letters, partly in prose and partly in doggerel verse. De Chaulieu was " the Anacreon of the Temple, preaching pleasure . . . singing in praise of Tokay at the table of the gods." Debussy, the " ornament of the Church and of love," was exhorted to return to " the dear city where Venus holds her court." To the Prince de Vendôme he wishes good health and good wine.

No young man could have found himself in a more depraved, a more distinguished or a more amusing company. It must have been a rare sight when the old de Chaulieu, his wig all awry, sung elegant obscenities to his own accompaniment upon the lute. There must

have been a dreadful charm in the gay blasphemies of Courtin, a dreadful joy when all propriety was blown away by some terrific epigram.

Here, thought Arouet, was the true freedom of men of spirit. This was how to live, how to think. Here indeed were leisure and pleasure, wit and learning, and a noble exemption from the dull duties and duller responsibilities of the mere ordinary man. Here indeed was the "table of the gods." And we cannot blame him. He was flattered, and naturally so, at being thus admitted to the naughtiest, the most exclusive and most brilliant society in Paris. The Temple suppers, however orgiastic they may have been, were no ordinary revels. Wit flowed as freely as wine, and when the wine overcame the wit and the company sank in the gross depravities of drunkenness, the classic imagery was still there—the Abbé Anacreon, the Prior Silenus. It was the company that young Arouet would have chosen for himself, and in which he found easily his appropriate place. He was neither contaminated nor led astray. He was receiving what was, for him, the properest education. In the shameless and elegant profanities of these men, loudly flouting all things holy and venerable, he found themes exactly fitted to his own taste. He could not, or would not, drink; but he could rhyme with the best of them. Both at the Temple and at the frivolous parties of the Duchess of Maine, he discovered his natural entertainment.

The elements of a great revolution were even then clearly assembling themselves. And it is curious to observe how those who would naturally be the first victims of a revolution were so active in preparing the way for it. By nourishing a cynical philosophy, by destroying the old power and dignity of the Church, by

disregarding every kind of moral obligation or restraint, and above all by the arrogant assertion of the individual and of the right to entire freedom in speech or conduct, the French nobility were busy hammering nails into the coffin of those very institutions by which alone a privileged nobility could be maintained.

Voltaire himself, in whom the principles of aristocracy and of feudalism were deeply rooted, can never have realised that he was helping to set in motion those forces which were ultimately to sweep away the whole preposterous fabric. He did not see that the superstition of aristocracy was every whit as insecure as the superstition of religious faith. Could he have been a spectator of his own apotheosis in 1791, no one could have looked on that amazing scene with greater astonishment ; and he would probably have said, that here was an instance of that grim play of determinism which compels every man, whether consciously or not, to serve the general purpose.

François-Marie had the strange confidence of the egoist. He seemed to think it unlikely that any one could be really angry with him ; he could not see that his own words might expose him to inconvenience, if not to danger. It appeared to him quite reasonable to print verses about the Regent, in which he said that "his Messaline of a daughter was no better than a whore." The wretched indecency of such a thing never came into his mind. He was surprised to find that the police, who had been watching him with some interest, took a very different view of the case.

On the 4th of May, 1716, an order from His Royal Highness banished François-Marie to Sully-sur-Loire, "where he had certain relations whose advice and example might correct his indiscretion and moderate

his vivacity." For such a scurrilous and mean offence, the punishment was not severe.

After his return to Saint-Ange he was visited by a police agent or spy, whose name was Beauregard. The spy knew his man, and found it easy enough to make young Arouet abuse the Regent, slander Madame de Berry, and through sheer vanity claim the authorship of some Latin verses beginning with the words *Regnante puero*—another sorry lampoon. The conversation with Beauregard took place early in May, 1717, and on the 16th day of the month François-Marie was conducted to the Bastille.

Here, although Beauregard was able to cite witnesses, François-Marie denied everything with placid effrontery. He even made the amusing, though refutable, suggestion that *Regnante puero* was written in the time of Catherine de' Medici. In later life, he never hesitated to repudiate his own work, or to ascribe it to some other writer, real or imaginary, whenever it suited his purpose to do so. He used to say, afterwards, that he had been arrested as the author of a satire (*J'ai vu*) written and circulated in 1715 by Le Brun ; a statement heedlessly repeated by many of his biographers. The report of his examination at the Bastille makes it sufficiently clear that such was not the case. François-Marie was detained for eleven months in the prison.

He was not idle. The energies of his mind, so often misled by spite or vanity, but which made him ultimately such a tremendous force, kept him incessantly occupied. His tragedy of *Oedipus*, begun some years previously, was revised and rewritten in the Bastille, and the national epic of the *League* was continued within the walls of the national prison. By way of lighter exercise, he wrote a silly poem on his adventure.

On the 10th of April, 1718, the king, who was then eight years old, sent a note to the governor of the Bastille, "on the advice of my uncle the Duke of Orleans," telling him to release François-Marie Arouet. He was, however, to be exiled to his father's country house at Châtenay by Sceaux. Exile of this kind was the ordinary sequel to imprisonment.

From Châtenay, on Good Friday, the 15th of April, 1718, he wrote a curious letter to d'Argenson, the Lieutenant of Police :

"Sir, allow me to make the first use of my liberty by writing to thank you for having procured it. I can only exhibit my gratitude by proving my conduct worthy of this favour and of your protection. I think I have profited by my misfortunes, and I venture to assure you that I am not less obliged to His Highness the Regent for my liberty than I am for my imprisonment. I have been guilty of many faults ; but I beg you, Sir, to assure His Royal Highness that I am neither so wicked nor so stupid as to have wrote against him. I have never spoke of this Prince but to admire his genius, and I would have done the same had he been any ordinary man. My respect for him has always been the more profound since I know that he hates praise fully as much as he deserves it. Although you resemble him in this, I cannot forbear from congratulating myself on having fallen into your hands, and from telling you that your merit ensures the happiness of my life.

"I am, with the highest Respect and Gratitude,

"Your most humble most obliged Servant,

AROUET."

Is this mere effrontery ? We can hardly believe in

the sincerity of these protestations, and yet we should like to think that Arouet's gratitude was not wholly affected. At the same time, we cannot suppose (as Condorcet does) that he was set free because there was no longer any doubt of his "innocence." The fact that his offences were clear never prevented Voltaire from declaring himself quite incapable of such offences, and from assuring his victims that he had always regarded them with the highest esteem. He never allowed himself to be troubled by so slight a thing as the apparent contradiction between what he said and what he did. He had all the dreadful advantages of egoism ; and it was this which made it difficult for any honest man to get him in a corner.

It was about this time (1718) that François-Marie Arouet assumed publicly the name of Voltaire. Arouet was a poor sort of name for a gentleman, and even worse for a poet. Think of it below the title of a tragedy ! It would never do. Arouet de Voltaire, on the other hand, looked well enough ; and was not Voltaire (or something like it) the name of a family estate ? Monsieur de Voltaire began to cut a figure in the world : old Arouet grumbled over his accounts.

Oedipus was now being prepared for the stage. Permission to visit Paris for twenty-four hours was granted on the 19th of May ; another permission, this time for eight days, was obtained on the 11th of July ; and another, for a whole month, is dated the 8th of August.

The tragedy was first performed on the 18th of November, 1718. Dismayed by the fitting austerity of the piece, the players had demanded a love scene. Without such a scene, they said, no play had a ghost of a chance. Voltaire, whose taste was infinitely better

than that of the players, had been forced to include a dreary romantic episode, with characters about as true and lifelike as the gilded cupids upon a mirror.

We are now, perhaps, inclined to look upon a Voltairean tragedy as we should look upon some old piece of carefully made and admirably ingenious clockwork. It is very clever ; but we have no desire to wind it up and set it going. The literary museum is full of such pieces. They are essentially the relics of a period, of taste or fashion ; we find it a little hard to realise the excitement of those who first saw them, or to appreciate the fulsome praises which were showered upon the inventors. But to the audience of 1718 *Oedipus* represented a supreme theatrical achievement. Here, they said, was a man worthy to be compared with Racine and Corneille, if he was not positively greater than either of them. In some ways, indeed, he was quite as good as Sophocles. Barely twenty-four years old—clearly a marvellous youth.

And if we turn to the last scene of the last act, we find something like this :

THE HIGH PRIEST

Good folk, a happy calm dispels the storm ;
Behold, serene, the sun above your heads ;
Contagious fires no longer shine around ;
Your tombs, late opened, now are clos'd again ;
Death hurries hence ; the god of heav'n and earth
Makes known his goodness by the thunder's voice.
(*Here thunder is heard and lightning seen.*)

JOCASTA

What flashes ! Heaven ! Where am I ? What means this ?
Barbarians ! . . .

THE HIGH PRIEST

It is done. The gods relent.
Laius, from death return'd, no more pursues;
He grants to thee to live, and yet to reign;
The blood of Oedipus hath quench'd his rage.

CHORUS

Ye gods!

That is how the machinery works at a moment of high emotional tension. To us, the lines are painfully artificial, and the whole scene appears to lack device or character. We are more interested in those lines which foreshadow the real Voltairean philosophy:

"Our priests are not what folk would vainly think;
'Tis our Credulity makes all their Power.
. . . . . .
Ah wretched Virtue! sterile, fatal word
Whose dreary rule hath govern'd hateful days."

The tragedy had a run of forty-five performances: a success almost without parallel on any European stage. Pamphlets, praising or decrying it, were quickly printed and quickly sold. Jean-Baptiste Rousseau spoke of the play with generous enthusiasm: he compared it with that of Sophocles, and "was compelled to admit that the Frenchman of twenty-four was in many respects victorious over the Greek of eighty." His Highness the Prince de Conti deigned to address a long and flattering poem to the new Racine. La Motte, the stage censor, was equally enthusiastic. Nor was the social triumph of Voltaire less gratifying than the public triumph of his work.

During the first representation of *Oedipus*, the high priest was followed on the stage by a pert, ridiculous young man bearing his train. The beautiful Marquise

de Villars turned to her friends. "Who is that queer fellow, who is doing his best to ruin the whole performance?" "That, Madam, is the author." She was amused by what seemed to her an exhibition of striking originality, and desired to make the acquaintance of so odd a creature. Thus began Voltaire's romantic friendship with Madame de Villars and with her husband, the elderly, dull but famous Marshal.

That he was deeply and desperately in love with Madame de Villars, or that he was capable of being deeply and desperately in love with any one, is highly improbable. He was never the man for a serious passion. With the one possible exception of Madame du Châtelet, it is doubtful whether he had ever a real and lasting fondness for any woman. He was, in his youth, a libertine, a gallant, but not a lover in the nobler sense of the word. He could make no sacrifice; he could offer no tenderness, no consideration, none of those pretty displays of sentiment to which a true passion may give so high a value. Nor would he run the danger of the least interférence with his personal freedom.

Madame la Maréchale de Villars had no intention of allowing Voltaire to become her lover; not because of any scruples, but because it pleased her better to flirt with him. She gave him, none the less, a real friendship, and even a certain measure of affection. He spent many days at the great château of Villars; and there he was always a very entertaining and a very welcome guest.

For some three years, or more, Arouet de Voltaire led the life of an elegant vagabond, passing from one great country house to another; a flighty, a most diverting fellow, telling pretty ladies the names of the

stars, and showing them how to spy the planets with their opera glasses, or writing verses for them ; making little essays in natural science ; always fashionable, always in demand, and flitting easily among the most illustrious companies. After all, he was himself illustrious : had he not written the finest tragedy in the French language ? And so the great folk of Sully or Villars or Richelieu were glad enough to see the lean, lively figure of Monsieur de Voltaire, the author of *Oedipus*.

But the great national epic was now laid aside. François-Marie, though he contemplated a new tragedy, found himself curiously disinclined for work. According to him, this was due to his " unhappy passion " for Madame de Villars. It is much more likely that he was merely talking about this affair in order to have his name associated with that of the Maréchale. He was at this time, and had been for two or three years, on terms of close intimacy with Madame de Mimeure.

When he visited Paris, he found life full of vexations and troubles. There was a most unpleasing money transaction, and a scandalous brawl with Poisson of the Comédie-Française. Threats of the law on the one side and a cudgelling on the other. The gallant companies of the châteaux, and occasional retirement to some luxurious retreat, were greatly to be preferred. But never could this tempestuous man find peace. His eager mind, like a flame, was in perpetual and responsive movement, searching for all the mysteries, all the knowledge and all the experience of life. No man was more fiercely anxious to obtain happiness, and none was more incapable of securing it.

Early in 1719, he writes to Madame de Mimeure : " We cannot overcome destiny : I was confident,

Madam, that I should not quit the delightful solitude in which I find myself [at Bruel] unless to go to Sully; but the Duke and Duchess of Sully have gone to Villars, and here am I, willy-nilly, obliged to seek 'em there. They must needs run me to earth in my hermitage and pray me to go to Villars ; but they shan't make me lose my repose there. I now wear a philosopher's mantle, which I would not cast aside for anything in the world." And again, later : " It seems to me that I am not at all made for the passions. 'Tis something ridiculous in me to love, and even more so in those who would love me. So there it is : I renounce it for my life." And then, later still : " I am now at Villars : I spend my time in wandering from castle to castle. . . . Our poem [the *Henriade*] makes but little progress."

In the course of these wanderings, the tragedy of *Artémire* was composed, and it was played on the 15th of February, 1720. The triumph of *Oedipus* was not repeated. On the contrary, the tragedy fell flat. It ran for eight nights with difficulty, viewed by a rather bored audience, and was then withdrawn. And yet the Abbé Debussy had been moved to tears by a reading, and Voltaire's coterie had predicted a brilliant success.

Meanwhile, the great national poem, the *Henriade*, though not complete, was already becoming famous. Thiériot was busy circulating manuscript copies of the parts which were already finished, and as the poem grew it seemed more and more assured of a splendid reception.

In 1721 we find Voltaire drifting again from one château to another, and passing his time agreeably enough. From Villars, in June, he wrote a letter to the amiable savant Fontenelle, partly in verse and partly in prose. The ladies at Villars were spending the summer evenings in the park or in " delicious gardens,"

naming the stars and searching the sky for Venus or Mercury. And they had noted a curious phenomenon :

" As we spend our nights in observing the Stars, we have much neglected the Sun, to whom we only pay our respects when he has covered nigh two-thirds of his course. We have but now learned that all this morning he was of a blood red colour ; and afterwards, tho' the sky was not obscured by any cloud, he was sensibly diminished both in size and brilliance; we have only heard this news at five in the afternoon. Putting our heads out of the window, we have mistook the Sun for the Moon, so pale was he. We doubt not that you have seen the same thing at Paris."

On New Year's Day, 1722, Voltaire's father died, leaving his office to the Jansenist brother Armand, and to his younger son a comfortable income. But the management of the patrimony gave rise to increasingly bitter disputes between the brothers.

Already, at the age of twenty-seven, Voltaire was talking incessantly of his ill-health. He was in the clutches of Monsieur Vinache, a quack doctor with a fashionable clientele. According to himself, indeed, he was never well at any period of his life. Yet nothing could impair the diabolical energy of this strange invalid. The impact of his colliding personality was like the impact of some explosive force, provoking his enemies to fury and violence. He was always in movement : writing, wandering, flirting, fretting, devising new works and revising old ones, quickly repairing any cracks in the fabric of his self-esteem, and ready to spring forward on the moment to any fresh encounter.

At this time (1722) he wrote many letters to Madame

de Bernières—Madame la Présidente. She was a handsome and fashionable woman, not unduly severe, but not wholly frivolous. Voltaire was probably her lover ; but here, as in other instances, the fact is not clear and the question is of little or no importance. Being a lover seems usually to have been a matter of little or no importance to Voltaire himself. To Madame de Bernières he wrote from Villars towards the end of May, 1722 :

" I stay for seven or eight days at Villars, where I drink cider and eat rice every evening, which does me a world of good. . . . I am distress'd by the treatment they have accorded to little Livry [an actress dismissed from the Comédie]. If the like treatment were applied to other bodies, methinks few would hold their places. I am reforming my poem in much the same manner, for I am occupied in chasing the bad verses out of it. 'Tis a somewhat long operation, but I hope to finish it at Rivière-Bourdet. I congratulate you upon the dissipated life you are leading. I wish indeed that I could do the same ; but with a head and health so ridiculous, I cannot have a greater consolation than the kindness with which you have lighten'd my cure by your society in *Paris*. Be assured that I shall remember all my life the proofs which I have received of your friendship, and that I shall be ever most tenderly devoted to you."

In June, or early in July, he received a letter from the Marshal de Villars ; a friendly, bluff and cheerful letter, in which the old soldier gives the poet some good advice and the renewed assurance of a welcome at Villars.

" If you'll take my word for it," he says, " you won't

abandon yourself to Vinache, although his seductive lectures, the art of uniting the influence of the seven planets with the minerals and the seven noble parts of the body . . . are truly admirable." And then a kindly prescription : " Come you here and eat good dishes at regular hours, take but four meals a day, retire in good time, see neither pen nor paper, neither biribi nor lansquenet ; I'll allow you tric-trac. Two months of this regime are worth more than Vinache.— A thousand thanks for your news. The marquis [his son] has seen the theatre clos'd with sorrow, and has thereupon resolv'd to go back to his regiment ; my post-chaise, which will take him to Paris on Saturday, shall bring you here again on Sunday." The letter closes with a customary touch of simple pride : " We have at present a fine and numerous company, since we are twenty-two at table ; but many of them are leaving to-morrow."

It seems probable that Voltaire, in spite of his alleged " unhappy passion " for the Maréchale, was never more at his ease, never more petted or more pleasantly occupied, than when he stayed at Villars ; and he stayed there often.

A very disturbing and sordid affair took place in the summer of 1722. It will be remembered that Voltaire had been committed to the Bastille on the information of a spy named Beauregard. One day at Versailles, the spy and the poet met face to face. That was too much. Without addressing himself directly to Beauregard, the poet was heard to mutter angrily about " spies," " dishonest rogues " and so forth ; and then, turning to Le Blanc, the Minister for War, he delivered himself of an unforgivable speech : " I knew well that spies were paid, but I never knew their reward was to eat at the Minister's

table." This was a foolish affront to the Minister, however richly he may have deserved it, and a public insult which Beauregard at once resolved to wipe out. A few days later, Voltaire's chair was stopped on the Pont de Sèvres, Voltaire was forced to alight, and cruelly beaten.

To beat an ordinary poet was a matter of no consequence, but to beat Voltaire was to let loose the devil at one's heels. A warrant for the arrest of Captain Beauregard was at once issued : the wretched creature fled to his regiment. He could not thus escape the poet's revenge.

Whether he was righting his own wrongs or those of another, Voltaire set about his work with a terrible fixity of purpose. He was implacable, tenacious, unswerving in pursuit. Time was of no account, money was of no account, energy was of no account : revenge was everything. The pursuit of Beauregard became " the great affair." Sometimes he conducted the pursuit in person, sometimes by means of his powerful friends. Whatever his other concerns and occupations, the " great affair " was never out of his mind for long. Beauregard was pursued relentlessly for more than a year, his protector Le Blanc was banished, and at last he was run to earth and clapped into the prison of the Châtelet. And so the sorry business came to an end ; and if Beauregard deserved the prison, it is certainly a question whether Voltaire did not deserve his beating.

In July, 1722, the poet (as he was then called) set out for the Low Countries with Madame de Rupelmonde.

This new companion was the daughter of the Marshal d'Aligre, and was the lively widow of a rich Fleming. She affected philosophy, loved good verses, cared nothing for gossip, and behaved in all respects like a

woman of quality, without being a fool. It would seem that she was travelling to the Hague on her own business, and, as she was not pressed for time, she invited Voltaire to " accompany " her.

No proposal could have been more to his liking. For him, mere beauty in a woman was never enough ; but here was beauty most happily allied with spirit, fancy and understanding. His own superior conversation would be appreciated ; and what more delightful than to travel with a handsome woman who could thus flatter him so agreeably and in so many ways ? His one condition was a halt at Brussels, where he might embrace the other great poet, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau.

But the first halt was at Cambrai, where the Cardinal Dubois occupied, by no means worthily, the former episcopal chair of Fénelon. Here the travellers found " all the ambassadors and all the cooks of Europe " assembled for a grand congress. And here, after a little intrigue on Voltaire's part, *Oedipus* was played in the presence of the author, followed by the *Oedipus Travestied* of Dominique. So pleasing was the poet's reception at Cambrai, so gracious the attention of the nobility, so fine the suppers, so ingenious and varied the entertainment, that the poet and the lady stayed there for something over six weeks. On the 10th of September, Voltaire wrote to friend Thiériot : " I am actually at Cambrai, where I am infinitely better received than ever I have been in Paris. If this continues, I shall assuredly renounce my country, unless you promise to love me always."

Then to Brussels, the poet and the lady discussing ethics, philosophy and religion as the chaise jolted them along on the stony roads. Out of these conversations grew the poem of the *Epistle to Julia* (or *Urania*)—

an open attack on every kind of dogmatic faith, and a statement of truculent deism. François-Marie addresses himself to his God in these assuring terms :

" I am no Christian : 'tis to love thee more."

At Brussels came the long-desired meeting with Rousseau. The two poets embraced each other with appropriate effusions ; but, as Crouslé well observes, " sparks flew at the first encounter." In the course of a few days, the French Horace and the French Sophocles were aware of a mutual hostility. Voltaire read aloud the *Epistle to Julia*, and Rousseau was profoundly shocked. Such an attitude was not surprising on the part of a man who had written sacred odes, and who professed a warm attachment to the Catholic faith. Then Rousseau, for his part, read an *Ode to Posterity*. " It seems to me, Sir, 'twill scarce reach the address," said François-Marie. After that came the turn of the *Henriade*. It was wrong, said Rousseau, to fly out against the Holy Church and the Pope and the government in what was meant to be an epic poem ; such a poem should be written in the style of Virgil and not in that of Juvenal. Jean-Baptiste presented Arouet with his own poem, *The Judgment of Pluto*. Such offences are not readily forgiven. Horace and Sophocles parted angrily and were never reconciled.

Voltaire and Madame de Rupelmonde went on to the Hague, where arrangements were made for the publication of the *Henriade*. Here, on the 10th of October, Voltaire wrote to Madame de Bernières :

" Your letter has brought a fresh delight to the life I am leading at the Hague. Of all the pleasures in the

world I know of none more flattering than the assurance of your friendship. I shall remain yet a few days at the Hague in order to take all the necessary steps for the printing of my poem, and I shall set forth when the fair weather has come to an end. There is no place more agreeable than the Hague when the sun deigns to show himself. One sees nothing but fields, canals and green trees : 'tis an earthly paradise from the Hague to Amsterdam. I have gazed with respect upon this town, which is the storehouse of the Universe. There were more than one thousand vessels in the port. . . . At the Hague, there is greater magnificence, and more high society for the congress of ambassadors. I spend my time betwixt labour and pleasure, by turns a Dutchman and a Frenchman. We have a detestable Opera here ; but, against that, I see Calvinist ministers, Armenians, Socinians, Rabbis and Anabaptists who all speak marvellously well, and who are truly all in the right."

That Voltaire, while openly travelling with Madame de Rupelmonde, should have carried on a free and friendly correspondence with another woman, whom all the world believed to be his mistress, is a fact worth noting.

Soon after his return to France and after he had quitted Madame de Rupelmonde, Voltaire spent a day at La Source with Bolingbroke.

This remarkable Englishman was a friend after the poet's own heart.

Henry St.-John, Viscount Bolingbroke, then in his forty-fourth year, had never allowed any scruples to interfere either with pleasure or with ambition. Orthodoxy in any form appeared to him ridiculous, and

loyalty a mask for interest. He had been Secretary for War and a friend of Marlborough, but his known sympathy with the Jacobite cause had led to his dismissal by George I. After his disgrace, he retired to France, a country for which he felt a great affection and which he had often visited. In 1717 he formed an intimacy with the Marquise de Villette, and married her, after the death of his wife, in 1720. He acquired the property of La Source, near Orleans, rebuilt the house and laid out the grounds with admirable taste in the English manner.

His posthumous works, published by Mallet in 1754, were described by Boswell as "wild and pernicious ravings," and the author was thus pompously denounced by Johnson : "Sir, he was a scoundrel and a coward : a scoundrel for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality ; a coward because he had not resolution to fire it off himself, but left half-a-crown to a beggarly Scotchman, to draw the trigger after his death."

Writing of a later visit to La Source, in a letter to Thiériot dated the 2nd of January, 1723, Voltaire speaks of Bolingbroke with marked enthusiasm :

"I have found in this illustrious Englishman all the erudition of his country and all the politeness of our own. I have never heard our language spoke with greater justness or vigour. This man, who has been plunged all his life in pleasures and in the affairs of State, has none the less been able to learn all, to remember all. He knows the History of the Ancient Egyptians as he knows that of England. He has Virgil as well as Milton; he loves French, English and Italian Poetry; but he loves them differently, because he discerns perfectly the different Genius of each. After the portrait which I

have made of Milord Bolingbroke, it would ill become me, perhaps, to tell you that both he and Madame de Villette have been infinitely pleased with my poem. In their enthusiasm and approval they place it above all the poetical works which have appeared in France ; but I know how to discount such extravagant praises."

It has been suggested that Bolingbroke had a certain influence on the opinions of Voltaire, but nothing seems more improbable. As a writer, Bolingbroke was negligible, in spite of his undoubted powers of oratory. If he thought freely, he thought vaguely, and his own views amounted to little more than a pale deism. Voltaire liked him because he was a distinguished man living in the glamour of exile ; and he liked him even more because he praised the *Henriade*.

Late in 1722, or perhaps early in 1723, came a rude shock. The government refused to allow the publication of the great national poem. The agreement with the Dutch printer had to be cancelled, the money returned to the subscribers, the pretty vignettes and fleurons laid aside. But Voltaire, who could never be turned from any of his designs, resolved to have the work secretly printed at Rouen. The printing of the poem (or rather, of the greater part of it) was accordingly supervised by that willing friend, Thiériot, and it was ready for distribution in June, 1723, under its earlier title of *The League*. From Rouen, copies of the book were ingeniously smuggled to Paris. The mystery of the publication and the exciting reputation of the author would have been enough to sell any number of copies, and the great national epic had an immediate success. *Oedipus* had been proclaimed the work of a new Sophocles ; *The League* was proclaimed the work of

a new Virgil. And now the applause, loud as it was, has died away and left no echo : tragedy and epic are rarely taken from the shelves, unless to receive the kindly attentions of a duster.

In this year (1723), Piron, who thought himself, and who probably was, as good a poet as Voltaire, produced the farce of *Harlequin-Deucalion*, which contained an amusing parody of the hapless *Artémire*. Such mockery was little to the taste of the new Virgil.

Piron is said to have met Voltaire in Madame de Mimeure's apartment, where the author of *The League* was stretching his legs in front of a good fire. In reply to the boisterous greeting of Piron, the other bowed stiffly, but kept silence. Piron dragged an arm-chair to the fireside, or as near as he could get to it, and attempted a conversation. The attempt failed. There they sat ; Piron with his fat round face full of bewilderment ; Arouet haughtily silent ; both staring at the fire, or taking an occasional pinch of snuff. At last the new Virgil thrust a hand into his pocket, drew out of it a large crust, and began to eat, with a noisy movement of his lean jaws. To this surprising gesture Piron made a fitting and equally unexpected reply. From his own pocket he produced a flagon of burgundy, which he drained without pausing. " Sir," said the new Virgil drily, " I can relish a jest as well as another man ; but your jest, if it is one, is very ill timed." He explained that what he did was a matter of regime: he had lately recovered from an illness which left him with a continual hunger. " Eat, Sir," replied Piron; " you do well. For my part, I have come from Burgundy with a continual thirst, and so I drink." The other condescended to smile faintly, rose, and left the room.

In November, 1723, while a guest at the château of

Maisons, Voltaire fell sick of what was then a terrible and deadly scourge : the small-pox. In Paris, the death-rate was appalling ; no precautions availed, the plague spread rapidly, and the one chance of safety lay in flight. Probably Voltaire had carried the infection with him from Paris, for the Marquis de Maisons felt indisposed on the 4th of November, but recovered.

Writing to the Baron de Breteuil in December, Voltaire describes his illness with a profusion of medical details. He " waited for death " with tranquillity, but regretting that he had not been able to give a final polish to the *Henriade* (he contemplated another edition) and to his new tragedy of *Mariamne*, and that he was obliged so soon to say good-bye to his friends. He drank, in the course of his disorder, " two hundred pints of lemonade." But the small-pox, he said, if unattended by complications, was " a purifying of the blood agreeable to nature, which, clearing the body of its impurities, prepares it for vigorous health." On the 1st of December, he was sufficiently well to leave Maisons for Paris.

The tragedy of *Mariamne* was played at the Comédie-Française on the 6th of May, 1724. It was received by the more assertive part of the house with impatience, amusement, or even hostility. When the poor heroine raised the cup of poison to her lips, some wretched wag cried out " The queen drinks ! " and the rest of the play could not be heard for tittering and laughter. This disturbance, which naturally had the effect of damning the whole piece, may have been due to a cabal against the author, who had many enemies. The tragedy is certainly as good as *Oedipus*, if not better, and was afterwards revived with success.

In August, Voltaire was at Forges with the Duke of

Richelieu, drinking the waters, and meeting a brilliant company. The cure was by no means to his taste. " There is more vitriol in a single bottle of Forges water than in a whole bottle of ink, and I don't believe that ink is particularly good for the health." But the company made amends. Here he met Madame de Prie, the avowed mistress of the Duke of Burgundy. It was always a part of his diplomacy to win the support of women who were in positions of power, and it was not long before he was the friend of Madame de Prie. During his visit to Forges, he wrote the little comedy of *The Indiscreet*; a light, easy and amusing piece of small consequence.

Returning from the waters, he sought retirement in the town house of Madame de Bernières in the Rue de Beaune. He was installed in the apartment of the marquise herself, and there he hoped to work in a friendly solitude. He was now concerned with a more complete edition of the *Henriade*. But he could not have come to a place less capable of providing the quiet he so greatly desired.

The infernal racket of the street below his windows drove him crazy. All day and all night, so it seemed, there was a clattering of drays, rumbling of coaches, creaking of barrows, tramping and shouting. He wrote in desperation to Thiériot :

" I find myself in a cruel position, truly ; for be sure that I have no wish to quit Madame de Bernières ; and yet 'tis impossible for me to live in her damn'd house, which is cold as the pole in winter, stinks of dung like a stable, and where there is more noise than in Hell itself. . . . I don't know what this will lead to ; what I do know is that 'tis absolutely necessary for me to

finish my poem ; for that I must find some quiet corner; and in the house of the Rue de Beaune I can do nought save write descriptions of barrows and coaches."

He worried himself into what was called a " tertian fever." Yet, in the following month, he had rented a room in the same house, to be shared with Thiériot.

The friendship of Madame de Prie was soon put to the test. In December, 1724, the Abbé Desfontaines had been arrested on a charge of sodomy and had been taken to the Châtelet. On the 25th of April in the following year he was removed to the prison of La Bicêtre. He was now in danger of a terrible death, for he had been accused of that very offence for which Deschauffours, two years later, was burnt alive.

Desfontaines was a mean scribbler, a man of conspicuously evil manners, flagrantly debauched, and, as the event proved, incapable either of loyalty or of gratitude.

Voltaire, though he scarcely knew the man, undertook his defence. Why he should have done so is not clear. The writings of Desfontaines did not entitle him to consideration as a man of letters, his character was deplorable, his friends—if he had any—were like unto himself. As the law stood, there could be no question of the legality of the arrest or of the subsequent proceedings. Voltaire must have engaged himself to defend this wretched creature on principle. If we ask ourselves what that principle could have been, we shall find it, possibly, in some way connected with the question of the right to punish ; and we are not likely to be mistaken if we see, in this case, one of the first mani-

festations of Voltaire's generous humanity. Certainly there was no renown to be won by undertaking such a defence in such an age.

As a result of the poet's intercession with Madame de Prie, Desfontaines was released on the 30th of May, 1725, but forbidden to come within thirty leagues of Paris. On the 7th of June, a second *lettre de cachet*, unquestionably due to the continued intercession of Voltaire, allowed him to return.

It is said that Desfontaines was occupied on a pamphlet against Voltaire while still in prison. Later, he attacked the man to whom he probably owed his life with the utmost bitterness, and there was open warfare between the two. Writing to Thiériot from England four years afterwards, Voltaire applied to the Abbé an Italian word which is quite untranslatable, and in 1735 he confessed to de Cideville that he regretted his kindness.

At the close of 1725, Voltaire appeared to be in a singularly happy position. He was thirty-one years old, with the reputation of being the first poet of the age. The king and the queen had each granted him a pension. To the young queen, Marie Leczinska, he was " her poor Voltaire," and she had cried over *Mariamne* and laughed at *The Indiscreet*. Madame de Prie had taken him under her wing ; and the French court, usually ruled by a woman, was then ruled by Madame de Prie. Villars, Richelieu, Sully and the Cardinal Dubois were to be reckoned among his friends. He talked gallantly, smiling but always observant, to the gay beauties of Fontainebleau, to amiable noblemen or dapper courtiers. He may have been feared : he was certainly petted. But he was not content. His ambitions were perpetually in advance of his achievement, his vanity was insatiable, he was always planning or desiring some new triumph;

every kind of enterprise found room within his capacious egoism.

And now came a series of events which, though springing from a trivial cause, were to have a profound influence upon the whole course of his life.

The Chevalier de Rohan, or Rohan-Chabot, whose only distinction seems to have been the fortuitous one of descent from a noble family, met Voltaire at the Opera. He may have been annoyed by something too self-assured in the bearing of François-Marie, who, after all, was only a poet. Of the words and scenes that followed we have different accounts, but there can be no question as to the gist of de Rohan's insult : " Ah, yes !—Monsieur Arouet—Monsieur de Voltaire—I have forgot : what do you call yourself ? " Voltaire replied smartly, that he knew at least how to honour his name. And then we have a vague story of another meeting at the Comédie-Française, of the one fingering his cane and the other his sword, and of Mademoiselle Lecouvreur, the actress, discreetly fainting.

If that was all, it was a foolish affair which a sensible man would have quickly forgotten. But there may have been a more deadly sting in the retort : another version, indeed, would make us believe that such was the case. Or perhaps de Rohan would have considered any answer an impertinence. However that may be, he decided upon a method of revenge which, disgraceful as it now seems to us, was then by no means uncommon.

Two or three days later, as Voltaire was dining with the Duke de Sully, he was told that a person in the street desired to speak to him. A carriage stood at some distance from the door. As he approached this carriage,

two men seized him by his coat and belaboured him with cudgels. From the door of another coach, which was drawn up not far behind the first, the brave Chevalier de Rohan appeared, and, in his own words, " gave orders to the workmen."

Voltaire, in a pitiable state, ran back to the company. That he was able to do so at all, frail as he was, proves that the cudgelling was not of the severest kind. He claimed, with passionate vehemence, the help of his old friend de Sully. But the duke was unmoved. The family of the Rohans was one of the most powerful in France, and de Sully may well have thought twice before risking their displeasure. Pale and furious, Voltaire left the house and hurried to the Opera, where he knew that he would find Madame de Prie. Madame, who was above any fear of the Rohans, listened with real compassion. But the Duke of Burgundy, who could have dealt harshly with the offender, regarded the affair as a matter of little consequence. To censure a Rohan for beating a mere poet would have been too absurd—de Sully had seen that clearly enough, and he was right to refrain from meddling in the sorry business.

Some of the poet's friends thought otherwise. The poet himself certainly thought otherwise. He gave himself blindly and fiercely to the idea of revenge. He was no swordsman, but now he began grimly to learn all the tricks of the rapier. According to a police report he associated with guardsmen, with bullies, and other bad company : he was nourishing evil designs, and preparing for " a combat."

The Rohans were seriously alarmed. The police were vigilant. On the 28th of March, 1726, the minister Maurepas sent a preliminary note to Hérault, the chief of police, advising him of the king's order for

the removal of Voltaire to the Bastille. This order did not immediately come into effect, and in the meantime Voltaire seems to have challenged de Rohan, though precisely how and when is not clear. What is certain is that during the night of the 17th of April, the police agents Haymier and Tapin arrested " Arouet de Voltaire, the famous poet," and conducted him, by order of the king, to the famous prison. On the day following the arrest, Hérault informed Maurepas of the execution of the order, and noted that the foolish and wicked young man had provided himself with pocket pistols. " The family," said Hérault, " having learnt of this, have unanimously applauded the wisdom of an order which prevents this young man from committing some folly, and spares the honest folk of whom this family is compos'd from sharing in his confusion."

Whatever the family may have thought (and they were probably glad to see the wild poet laid by the heels), the arrest was not generally popular. " I am sorry for this poor Voltaire," said Madame de Prie ; " after all, he was in the right." De Villars, in his *Memoirs*, observes with good sense and fairness that " the publick, always ready to blame, found on this occasion, and with reason, that everybody was in the wrong—Voltaire for having insulted the Chevalier de Rohan ; the Chevalier for having dared, by beating a citizen, to commit a crime deserving death ; the government for not having punished an evil deed, and for having clapped the beaten man into the Bastille in order to set at ease the assailant."

But a sour priest, whose name we do not know, was mightily pleased, and saw fit to write a letter of congratulations to Hérault :

" You have just placed in the Bastille a man I have

been wishing to see there for these fifteen years. 'Tis now some ten or twelve years since, being at Saint-Sulpice for the purpose of seeing the Abbé d'Albert, I complained to him of the business of the man in question, preaching Deism openly in the dressing-rooms of our young Noblemen ; I could have ask'd for power but for one day, I told him, so that I might have clapped this poet between four walls for the rest of his life. . . . I may be excus'd for not giving you my name . . . one may justly fear those who dare to attack even Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Almighty."

Voltaire was not treated like a common prisoner. He dined with the governor, de Launay (the father of that unfortunate man who was governor in 1789), and was allowed to see some of his friends. He wrote to Maurepas and to Hérault, complaining, not without dignity, of his situation, and asking for banishment to England.

An order for his release from the Bastille was delivered to the governor on the 2nd or 3rd of May by a police officer named Condé, who was to escort Voltaire to Calais, and there to see him safely shipped for England. The order had actually been signed on the 23rd of April.

The poet wrote in haste to Madame de Bernières for the loan of her chaise, and on the 5th he was at Calais. Within a week of that date he had arrived in England.

His friends were relieved by what appeared to them to be the end of a dangerous adventure ; but François-Marie, however willingly he may have departed, still nursed a burning resentment, and still meditated revenge on the infamous de Rohan.

CHAPTER II

ENGLISH HOSPITALITY

NOTHING is more pleasing to Englishmen than to hear their country praised by a foreigner. Such praise is, or seems to be, an impartial testimony to the merit of that country, and a grateful confirmation of the fact that it is, indeed, greatly superior to any other country in the world.

There are, no doubt, many folk in this privileged country to whom Voltaire's one virtue is his affection for England and for the English people. He had good reasons for gratitude. He was handsomely entertained, equally free to choose between gaiety and retirement, able to move about with no fear of spies, and at liberty to write without danger of interruption. But we must remember that he was an angry man when he left France. He was tingling with a sense of bitter injustice, unable to digest the ignominy to which he had been subjected, and ready enough to find in some other country the haven of all his hopes.

The exile (for so he would certainly have described himself) landed on a bright spring afternoon. When he saw the green lawns of Greenwich, the sparkling river, the shining sails of the merchantmen, the king's golden barge, the crowds of young girls in their pretty flowered calicoes, the trim young men seated upon their sleek nags, the rural sports, and all the light joy of an English holiday, he was full of a happy admiration, full of excitement ; and, hearing that " gladiators " were to be seen in town, he at once " believed himself to be among the ancient Romans."

Bolingbroke had returned to England, and was now

living either in his town house in Pall Mall or in his country house at Dawley near Uxbridge. He received his friend Voltaire with eager hospitality, and it is probable that the poet spent his first evening in Pall Mall. At any rate, he met some court ladies, who listened coldly to his enthusiastic description of Greenwich. They took tea, rattled their fans, played quadrille, read the *Gazette*, or chattered about their neighbours.

We lack the material for a continuous narrative of Voltaire's life during the three years which followed. We have to draw largely upon his own correspondence, always amusing and brilliant, but not always exact in matters of place or date. And the letters dating from this period amount, in all, to little more than fifty. It seems clear, however, that the period of the exile to England was a period of comparative tranquillity, immensely fruitful in literary work, and having a corresponding, though not a profound influence upon the teaching, writing and thinking of one who had not yet shown the peculiar force and character of his genius. It was essentially a period of retirement, the one moderately serene period in the whole of his life, marked by continued or increased energy and by healthy mental development, but not by extravagance or passion. Yet he found it impossible to adjust himself easily to this new and pleasing environment. He was obsessed, even now, by the importunate desire for revenge. Before he had been in England for many weeks, he was back again in Paris, moving furtively, and avoiding all his friends. His intention, it seems, was to meet de Rohan.

Of this curious episode we have little knowledge. After a few dark and restless days in Paris, hiding and watching, he withdrew to some country place, from

which, giving no address, he wrote a remarkably interesting and profoundly melancholy letter to Thiériot :

" My dear Thiériot, I have received, though much delayed, a letter from you dated the 11th of last May. You have seen my extreme misery in *Paris*. The same Destiny follows me everywhere. If the character of the hero of my poem is as well sustain'd as that of my ill fortune, my poem will assuredly succeed better than I have. You have bestowed upon me in your letter such touching assurances of your friendship that 'tis only just I should repay you by my confidence. I'll confess, then, my dear Thiériot, that I have paid a little visit to *Paris* not long ago. Since I did not see you there, you will readily conclude that I saw no one. I sought but one man, whose poltroon instinct concealed him from me, as though he had discovered that I was upon his tracks. At length, the fear of being discover'd compelled me to fly with greater haste than I had shown in arriving. So now 'tis done, my dear Thiériot ; it looks mightily as tho' I shall never in my life see you again. I am yet quite undecided whether I shall return to *London*. I know 'tis a country where all the arts are honoured and rewarded, where there is a difference of rank, but none other save that of merit. 'Tis a country where men think freely and nobly, without being hampered by any servile fear. If I followed my inclination, 'tis there I would fix myself, with the one idea of learning how to think. But I know not whether my little fortune, sadly broke by so many journeys, my ill health, more derang'd than ever, and my desire for complete retirement, will allow me to throw myself into the hurly-burly of *Whitehall* and of *London*. I am mightily well introduc'd in that country,

and people receive me with kindness enough ; but I'll not swear to you that I shall undertake this journey. There are now but two things to be accomplished in my life : the one, to risk it honourably as soon as I have the occasion to do so ; and the other, to finish it in the obscurity of a retirement suitable to my manner of thinking, to my misfortunes, and to my knowledge of mankind."

This letter, apparently written in a mood of extreme dejection, is in striking contrast to the gaiety of the first days in England. But we should never take too seriously the letters of a practised writer, in whom a sense of literary opportunity is seldom absent. When the writer is a man as full of resource, as moody, changeable and vehement as François-Marie, we may well treat him with a certain measure of reserve. To speak of the " hurly-burly of Whitehall " is all nonsense. Nothing obliged his attendance at Whitehall. In no other land could he have found greater quiet or more complete obscurity ; and even if he had not yet discovered the friendly shelter of Falkener's house and the green lanes of Wandsworth, he knew that he was a welcome guest at Dawley, where Bolingbroke, with a modish affectation of rusticity, drank ale with the haymakers and Whitehall was far enough.

But there was never a man to whom the idea of obscurity could have been more intolerable. He wanted leisure and freedom, not obscurity. This poor wounded creature, seeking only to recover his honour, and then to die in some unknown retreat, is not Voltaire. Gloom and pathos are both unreal. The letter must have been written in a passing mood of dreary resentment, of spite and thwarted revenge ; and written with

the intention of producing a moving and melancholy effect. Thiériot, he knew, would show the letter to Madame de Bernières, to Sully, Villars, and all his friends—in confidence. What is more, the stealthy visit to Paris (whether he had actually sought de Rohan or not) would prove that he was a man of honour, anxious to wipe out an insult, even at the risk of his personal freedom. And it may be noted, that Voltaire made no further attempt to meet de Rohan, although, after his return to France in 1729, there would have been no difficulty in doing so.

He returned to England at the end of July, and seems to have gone soon afterwards to Falkener's house at Wandsworth.

Everard Falkener was a wealthy merchant who traded with the Levant. He was appointed ambassador to the Porte in 1735, and in 1745 was private secretary to the Duke of Cumberland. Probably Voltaire had met him some years before in Paris, and Falkener had given him an invitation. In the house at Wandsworth, with its collection of rarities, its books and pictures, and the manly, ingenuous conversation of Falkener himself, Voltaire must have been happy. He always spoke of this amiable man with affection, never forgot his kindness and geniality, and dedicated to him the tragedy of *Zaïre*. For nearly thirty years after he had left England he wrote charming letters to his friend, and Falkener's death in 1758 affected him profoundly.

Wandsworth, with its trees and fields, pleasant waterways and rural quiet, was yet within a coach-ride of the noisy town. Voltaire seems to have spent his time between the town and the riverside village, but it is probable that the greater part of his first year in England was passed at Falkener's house.

In October, he wrote to Madame de Bernières from Bolingbroke's house in London :

" 'Tis but yesterday, Madam, that I have received your letter of the 3rd of September last. Misfortunes arrive quickly, and consolations are slow enough. Your remembrance of me is a very affecting consolation. The profound solitude to which I have retir'd has not permitted me to receive it earlier. I am in London for the moment ; I profit by this moment to give myself the pleasure of writing to you, and I shall go back immediately to my retreat.

" I wish you, from the depth of my cave, a happy and tranquil existence, affairs in good order, a little circle of friends, good health, and a profound scorn for what is call'd *Vanity*. I'll forgive you for having been to the Opera with the Chevalier de Rohan, provided that you felt some little confusion.

" Enjoy yourself as much as you can in the town or in the country. Remember me sometimes among your friends, and let constancy and friendship be added to the number of your virtues. Perchance my Destiny will some day bring me near to you. Let me hope that absence will not chase me altogether from your mind, and that I may find in your heart a pity for my sufferings which, at least, may resemble affection.

" For the most part, women know only passions or idleness ; but methinks I know you well enough to hope for your friendship.

" Perhaps I shall return to London soon, and there fix myself. I have but seen it in passing. If, on my arrival there, I find a letter from you, I think I shall spend the winter happily—if, indeed, the word happiness is made for the use of a wretch like myself. 'Twas

for my sister [who had recently died] to live, and for me to perish : 'tis a mistake of Destiny. I am sadly affected by her loss : you know my heart ; you know what love I had for her. I thought, truly, it would be she who would mourn me. Alas ! Madam, to the world I am more dead than she is, and perhaps to you also. Remember, at least, that you and I have liv'd together. Forget all that concerns me, save the moments when you vowed that you would always keep me in your affections. Reckon those in which I may have vexed you among the multitude of my misfortunes, and love me through generosity if you can no longer love me through inclination."

This was written at a time when Voltaire, even if he was not occupied with any literary work except the continual polishing of the *Henriade*, was applying himself to the study of English with amazing industry, and was eagerly making himself acquainted with the life and character of the English people.

His " retirement " was the occasion for new activities, and soon for new ambitions. For him, idleness and resignation were equally impossible. We see him always in motion: learning, working, devising, enquiring —never still, never at rest. And if he worked with ardour, he was not less active in recreation. In society he was quick, nervous, volatile, impatient, busy or domineering ; anxious to show his erudition and to exercise his alarming wit. He is, perhaps, the only Frenchman who never complained sincerely of the national curse of *ennui*.

He found English none too easy. He could not follow the rule by which a word spelt " handkerchief " was pronounced " ankicher." Nor could he readily

grasp the proper use of stops and of capital letters, for which there were no rules at all. One of his first letters written in English, addressed to Brinsden, a wine-dealer who acted as agent for Bolingbroke, has been perversely assigned to the year 1728 by two of the French editors, but with more probability assigned to the autumn of 1726 by Ballantyne. It is sufficiently curious to merit quotation :

" Sir, i wish you good health, a quick sale of yr burgundy, much latin and greeke to one of yr children, much Law, much of cooke and littleton to the other, quiet and joy to mistress brinsden, money to all. when you'll drink yr burgundy with mr furneeze, pray tell him i'll never forget his favours. But dear john be so kind as to let me know how does my lady Bollingbroke, as to my lord i left him so well i don't doubt he is so still. but i am very uneasie about my lady. If she might have as much health as she has spirit and witt, Sure she would be the Strongest body in England. Pray dear sr write me Something of her, of my lord, and of you. direct your letter by the penny post at mr Cavalier, Belitery square by the R Exchange. i am sincerely and heartily yr most humble and most obedient rambling friend Voltaire."

This is clearly the essay of a novice hand ; but in October, though with many corrections and alterations, he was able to write to Thiériot in more passable English :

" I intend to send you two or three poems of Mr Pope, the best poet of England, and at present of all the world. I hope you are acquainted enough with

the English tongue to be sensible of all the charms of his works. . . . Now . . . let me acquaint you with an account of my for ever cursed fortune. I came again into England in the latter end of July very much dissatisfied with my secret voiage into France both unsuccessful and expensive. I had about me onely some bills of exchange upon a Jew called Medina. . . . At my coming to London, I found my damned Jew was broken ; I was without a penny, sick to death of a violent aguë, a stranger, alone, helpless, in the midst of a city wherein I was known to no body. my Lord and Lady Bolingbroke were in the country : I could not make bold to see our ambassadour in so wretched a condition. I had never undergone such distress ; but I am born to run through all the misfortunes of life. In these circumstances my star, that among all its direful influences pours allways on me some kind refreshment, sent to me an English gentleman unknown to me, who forced me to receive some money that I wanted. An other London citizen [Falkener] that I had seen but once in Paris, carried me to his country house, wherein I lead an obscure and charming life, without going to London, and quite given over to the pleasures of indolence and friendshipp."

It is possible that Voltaire's position had not been really so desperate. We can hardly believe that the friend of a man as rich and as well known as Bolingbroke should have found himself without credit in London, or should have been unable to make his way to Dawley, where he was assured of a cordial welcome. Who, if he was friendless, was the gentleman who so obligingly forced him to receive money ? and when and how did he meet Falkener ? It has been suggested that the

" gentleman " was King George ; but, in that case, who drew the king's attention to this friendless exile ? Moreover, he had come to England with good recommendations, including one from Horatio Walpole, the ambassador in Paris, to the Duke of Newcastle. Ballantyne is right when he says : " Voltaire's friendship with Bolingbroke and the excellent introductions which he brought with him from France, opened up to him all the English circles of rank and intellect which he could have desired to enter." Voltaire himself, as we have seen, owned that he was " mightily well introduced " and received with kindness. Yet here was the poet speaking pathetically of being " a stranger, alone and helpless " in a city where he " was known to no body." We cannot but think it highly probable that Voltaire was at Wandsworth within a few days of his return to England.

He was extremely anxious to meet Pope, with whom he had already exchanged a few light compliments, and whose work he so warmly admired. But Pope was unequal to a French conversation ; and Voltaire, however rapidly and surely he acquired a literary knowledge of English, was still unable to talk fluently in any tongue save his own. Without any possibility of exchanging ideas, or even of understanding the ordinary polite phrases, a meeting could have been of little profit to either. In spite of this, Voltaire seems to have met Pope at the first opportunity which presented itself.

On a September evening in 1726, as Pope was returning in a coach from a visit to Bolingbroke at Dawley, the coach was overturned in crossing a stream and Pope himself was cut about the fingers with broken glass. Voltaire did not hear of this until he was at

Dawley in November. He at once wrote, in English, a fulsome but not ungraceful letter to Pope :

" Sir,—I hear this moment of your sad adventure. That water you fell in was not Hippocrene's water, otherwise it would have respected you. Indeed I am concerned beyond expression for the danger you have been in, and more for your wounds. Is it possible that those fingers which have written the *Rape of the Lock*, and the *Criticism*, which have dressed Homer so becomingly in an English coat, should have been so barbarously treated ? Let the hand of *Dennis*, or of your poetasters be cut of. Yours is sacred. I hope, Sir, you are now perfectly recovered. Really, your accident concerns me as much as all the disasters of a master ought to affect his scholar. I am sincerely, Sir, with the admiration which you deserve,

" Your most humble Servant,

" Voltaire."

Voltaire's first meeting with Pope seems to have taken place, probably at the Twickenham villa, soon afterwards.

There are several unreliable accounts of this meeting. Johnson's malevolent story, borrowed from Ruffhead, bears witness to his own credulity and spite. Goldsmith, who gives an entirely different version, is equally inaccurate. According to the first, Voltaire's conversation (in English) was so grossly indecent that poor Mrs. Pope, the poet's mother, was driven from the room. Others add blasphemy to the charge, and would have us believe that Pope's visitors, rising to their feet in anger, denounced the exile as a dog, a spy and a

scoundrel. Pretty behaviour ! But Goldsmith, on the other hand, draws a delightful, though purely imaginary picture : Voltaire enters the room and sees a little, sad, misshapen man, whom he could not help regarding " with the utmost compassion." The little man begins to talk, he reasons upon " moral obligations," he utters " the most delicate sentiments," and compassion gives way to wonder, and then to envy.

Both accounts are palpably absurd. The Ruffhead-Johnson story is damned by internal evidence. Voltaire's grossness, according to Ruffhead, lay in the description he gave of a disorder " contracted in Italy "—a country he never visited. And if that is not enough, need we point out, as Ballantyne has done, that Voltaire considered himself a man of the world, and that he was being entertained by one for whom he had the highest respect and whose company he so greatly desired ? And we should note, that the subsequent relations between Pope and Voltaire were of the most friendly sort ; and that Pope, with his acid, vindictive humour and his morbid sensibility, would have quickly resented and quickly avenged an insult. Nor is it likely that Voltaire would have been called a dog and a spy without letting the world know of it.

Johnson's perpetuation of this foolish story is to be reckoned among the rogueries of literature, and is certainly one of the most flagrant of his many blunders. The gentle and prettily finished account of Goldsmith is unhappily neutralised by the fact that Voltaire could not possibly have understood what Pope was talking about.

The account given of this meeting by Duvernet, though unsubstantial, is at least more likely to be true. According to him, the two men were unable to converse

together, and Voltaire retired to " a village " (Wandsworth), in order to study at leisure and to learn how to express himself in the English tongue.

In the spring of 1727, Voltaire met a greater man than Pope—the amazing Dean of St. Patrick's, Jonathan Swift. He may have met him at Lord Peterborough's house at Parson's Green, at Twickenham with Pope, or at Dawley with Bolingbroke. In 1728, he stayed for three months at Parson's Green in the company of Swift, who was then in his sixty-first year.

Here was a man whose humour, invention and sprightly malice were thoroughly congenial. Voltaire admired Swift greatly ; he spoke of him as " Rabelais without his nonsense," and, indeed, as superior to Rabelais. But *Gulliver*, the first part of which had appeared late in 1726, was not beyond criticism. He writes, in English, to Thiériot, dating his letter March, 1727 :

" You will find in the same pacquet the second volume of *Mr Gulliver* which by the by I don't advise you to translate. Stick to the first, the other is overstrain'd. The reader's imagination is pleased and charmingly entertain'd by the new prospects of the lands which Gulliver describes to him, but that continued series of new fangled follies, of fairy tales, palls at last upon our taste ; nothing unnatural may please long ; 'tis for this reason that commonly the second parts of romances are so insipid."

When, in the summer of 1727, Swift contemplated a visit to France, Voltaire supplied him with letters of introduction and assured him of his esteem : " I shall certainly do my best endeavours," he wrote in English,

" to serve you and to let my country know that I have the inestimable honour to be one of your friends."

It may have been at this time that Voltaire met Gay, whom he " loved vastly," and who showed him the manuscript of the *Beggar's Opera*.

The date of his visit to Congreve cannot be ascertained, but the story of the interview is well known. Congreve, who in later life affected to despise his own works, as though they had been the easy diversions of a man of fashion, was then a vain, besotted creature, protesting with a decayed elegance that he wanted to be treated as " a mere gentleman." " If you was only a mere gentleman," said Voltaire, " I would not have troubled to visit you." Congreve, who was then fifty-eight, gouty, blind and peevish, died on the 19th of January, 1729.

On the 18th of April, 1727, a curious memorandum was addressed by a police commissioner of Paris to his chief, Hérault :

" This note has the honour of informing you that I have been assured that Master Arouet de Voltaire has returned from England and has been prowling in this neighbourhood [Saint-Antoine]. I don't know whether he has come to settle his accounts for what took place outside de Sully's house, but he may be running a certain risk. As I am unaware if he has permission to return, I can say nothing more in regard to this matter, and I have thought it my duty to inform you of it."

The information, unless it was a belated rumour of Voltaire's return during the previous summer, was entirely false. On the very day on which this report was made, Voltaire, who had applied to the minister Maurepas for leave to return to Paris, wrote to him as follows :

" My Lord,

" I have received the honour of your letter with gratitude and with submission. The ill state of my health and of my fortunes are the sole motives which induce me to return to Paris. I promise, moreover, to forget the past, to forget every one, and to remember only your kindness.

" I am, my Lord, with respect,

" Your most obedient, most obliged humble Servant,

" Voltaire."

Maurepas, on the 29th of July, sent him the following dispatch :

" I send you a permit, graciously accorded by the King, to reside in Paris for a period of three months in order to attend to your affairs. As the time will be reckoned from the date of your arrival, you must take care to advise me of it ; I doubt not that you will conduct yourself in such a way as to remove the unfavourable impressions which have been convey'd to His Majesty, and that the advice which I give you is sufficiently pertinent to receive your full attention."

Now, we are ignorant of Voltaire's reasons in applying for this permission, and we know that he did not avail himself of it. There are no references to the proposed visit in any letter of his written to his friend Thiériot in 1727 ; but in a letter wrongly ascribed to this year in Moland's edition of the correspondence, though clearly dated by internal evidence, and now correctly placed by Foulet, we have the following passage (in English) : " I intend to make use of your advice, and to give the publick the best edition I can of the *Henriade* [published in March, 1728], together with my true *Essay on Poetry* [end of 1727]. . . . Now I want to

know when and where I could print secretly the *Henriade*? It must be in France, in some country town . . . but let nobody be acquainted with the secret of my being in France. I should be exceedingly glad, my dear Thiériot, of seeing you again, but I would see nobody else in the world ; I would not be so much as suspected of having set my foot in your country, nor of having thought of it : my brother especially is the least proper person to be trusted with such a secret, not only on account of his indiscreet temper, but also of the ill usage I have received from him since I am in England." In speaking of " my true *Essay*," he refers obliquely to a bungling French translation which had been made by the Abbé Desfontaines, a translation which he criticises freely in the earlier part of the same letter. The letter is thus written definitely nearly a year after the permit had been dispatched by Maurepas, and Voltaire seems to be still contemplating a visit to France. His purpose, then, apparently, was to supervise a French edition of the *Henriade*, for the English edition had been proscribed in France ; bút what were his designs in 1727 ?

Writing early in 1729, presumably in February, he refers again to a projected visit. " I had, two years ago, snatched from your court a short leave to come to Paris for three months. If I am smoaked out this bout, I will plead that former leave for my excuse, though it is perhaps good for nothing."

We have thus, on all three ocasions, evidence of Voltaire's wish to return secretly to France, not always with a clear motive ; and yet, having obtained permission, he never made use of it. The 1727 negociations, whatever they were, may conceivably represent a final half-hearted scheme for running down the wicked

de Rohan-Chabot. It is not easy to see in what way his health would have benefited from a visit to Paris, and he was adequately supplied with money. But this is mere conjecture.

Of his life and activities in 1727 we know very little. Early in this year he was presented at court, and he probably saw something of fashionable life in London. But there was never a man who exemplified more thoroughly his own axiom, " to work is to live," or one who discredited more thoroughly the axiom of Johnson that " no man would work unless he was obliged to." With him, living was writing. When he was not writing books, plays or poems, he was devising them in his mind, or improving those which had already emerged, or composing some of the ten thousand letters which, in the course of his industrious lifetime, he sent to his friends. It may be doubted whether any man ever wrote, with his own hand, so many words, or used words in so many ways. His energy, his life, flowed out of him in words. Expression—the swift conveyance of his thoughts from the glowing core of his brain to his ready hand ;—that was everything. The niceties of style, though he was careful to attend to them, were of less importance. Not only the ardour of the mental fight, but the less noble impulse of vanity played its part in this furious, bewildering, unceasing production. No man ever rode harder in the pursuit of fame.

One of his chief concerns in 1727 was obviously the printing of what we should now call the definitive edition of the *Henriade*—a fuller and more polished edition—in London. If it could afterwards be produced in France, so much the better : we have seen how he wrote on this subject to Thiériot in the following year. But a work in English, intended partly to adver-

tise the forthcoming *Henriade*, was also in his mind ; and so was the tragedy of *Brutus*. In addition to this, his admirable *History of Charles XII* was written, almost wholly, during his stay in England, and he was composing, from time to time, those graceful, daring and diverting *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, or *Philosophick Letters*, which were later to be collected in the form of a book.

The first act of *Brutus*, in English prose, was written at Falkener's house, probably in 1727, and was re-cast in French verse after Voltaire's return to France. Towards the end of the year he published the puff preliminary of the *Henriade—An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France Extracted from Curious Manuscripts And also upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations from Homer down to Milton*. In the preface to this odd performance he wrote :

" As to the present Essay, it is intended as a kind of Preface or Introduction to the *Henriade*, which is almost entirely printed, nothing being wanting but the printing of the Cuts, which I must recommend here as particular Master-Pieces of Art in their kind : 'tis the only Beauty in the Book, that I can answer for."

The essays can now only be regarded as curiosities of literature, lively and audacious, like all that he wrote, and stuffed with appropriate compliments, but with many faults and much exaggeration. The style, though it breaks down in places, is less halting than might have been supposed. There is no doubt, however, that the manuscript was carefully revised by an English reader.

It was in 1727 that Voltaire, busy collecting material for his *Charles XII*, met Sarah Jennings, Duchess of Marlborough. She was then a teasy, petulant old woman of sixty-eight, with a sharp tongue and a brusque

manner. From her he obtained particulars of a conference between her famous husband (who died in 1722) and the King of Sweden. But Sarah was more interested in her own memoirs, which she was then writing. Might he see them? "You must wait a while," said her Grace; "for I am now mending the character of Queen Anne: I have come to love her again since these good folk have become our rulers." The untrustworthy Goldsmith gives another story, according to which Voltaire found fault with a lack of decency and restraint in the manuscript, whereupon the Duchess plucked the papers from his hands, crying out that she thought the man had sense, but discovered him to be a fool or a philosopher.

Bubb Dodington, Lord Melcombe, the wealthy and elegant patron of poets, received the exile with much kindness. It was at Dodington's country house in Dorset that he met Young, the author of *Night Thoughts* (a poem not yet written in 1727); and here, in all probability, he met Thompson also.

The greatest Englishman of his time, Newton, was near his death when Voltaire arrived in England. On the 31st of March, 1727, Voltaire was a witness of his funeral, and was deeply impressed by the respect shown to the memory of a man of learning. To him, Newton was one "whose equal is hardly found in a thousand years." He sought eagerly the acquaintance of Mrs Conduit, the niece of the great man, and from her he received the famous story of the falling apple. He sought also a close personal friend of Newton's, Dr Samuel Clarke.

The Doctor was a grim and godly person, dry, whimsical, an inveterate polemist, to whom the feeble repartee of "Sir, do you acknowledge that two and two make

four ? " seemed weighty enough to close an argument. At the same time, it was probably Clarke who inspired Voltaire with a liking for metaphysics, and who taught him to make the first exhilarating plunge in the gulf of learned speculation.

Clarke died in 1729, not long after Voltaire's return to France.

Voltaire's own correspondence throws little light upon these activities and meetings. But on the 27th of May, 1727, he wrote one of the most interesting of his letters to Thiériot. With the exception of a few lines in French, here reproduced in italics, the letter is in English throughout :

" *My dear Thiériot, 'tis but lately that I have received, in the country place to which I have withdrawn, your charming letter of the 1st of April.* You cannot imagine with what sense of sorrow I have received the account you gave me of your sickness. I have carried my concern for you further than an ordinary friendship could allow. Remember the time when I was used to write to you that I believed you had a fever upon you whenever I had an ague. That time is come again. I was very ill in England while you suffered so much in France. An year absence added a new bitterness to my sufferings. Now I hope you are better, since I begin to revive.

" I hear that *M. Gulliver* is now translated and takes pretty much. I wish the translation could be yours : but I am afraid the Abbot [Desfontaines] has outrun you, and reaped the benefit which such a book should have procured to you.

" You must have received the two books addressed to Madame de Bernières from Calais, and conveyed

by the stage coach. If you intend seriously to make a translation of some valuable book, I advise you to sit still for a month or two, to take care of your health, and to improve your English till the book of Mr Pemberton [*A View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*] comes out. This book is an easy, clear and regular explanation of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy, which he undertakes to make palatable to the most unthinking man. It seems the man intends to write chiefly for your nation.

" If I am in England when the book shall be published, I will not fail of sending it to you with the utmost speed. If I am abroad, as I will be in all likelihood, I will order my bookseller to send you the book by the first opportunity. I fancy it will be an easy task to translate it, the language being very plain, and all the terms of philosophy being just the same in French and in English. Take care only not to be outvied in the future by any priest : be cautious in the choice of all those you will consult about your translation. I fancy the bishop of Rochester [Atterbury] is more amiable an acquaintance and a less dangerous one than the priest you speak of. But I believe you are now in Normandy, mending your health, loitering with Madame de Bernières, and talking of physick with des Alleurs. I must acquaint you, my dear, that there is an engine in England to take a clyster, which is a master-piece of art, for you may carry it in your fob and make use of it whenever and in what place you please. If ever I enjoy the pleasure of seeing you again, be sure to have a dozen of these delightful engines. Farewell, do not talk of the ' Occasional Writer.' Do not say it is not by my lord Bolingbroke ; do not say it is a wretched performance : you cannot be judge neither of the man nor of this writing. *Adieu, my very dear friend.*

"*I have just wrote an English thesis for the Chevalier des Alleurs. I have addressed the letter Quai des Théatins; if it has not been received, you must advise me of it: it must not be lost, for I have plac'd all my physick therein. Adieu, be well. Non vivere, sed valere vita.* If you want to enter into a course of strict diet, begin soon and keep it long.

> To morrow I will live, the fool does say.
> To day's too late, the wise liv'd yesterday.

"I am the fool, be the wise, and farewell."

In December, 1727, Voltaire was living at the White Perruque in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden. From this address he sent a copy of his English *Essay* to Swift, with the following English letter:

"Sir,

"You will be surprised in receiving an English essay from a French traveller. Pray forgive an admirer of you who ows to yr writings the love he bears to yr language, which has betray'd him into the rash attempt of writing in English.

"You will see by the Advertisement that I have some designs upon you, and that I must mention you for the honour of yr country and for the improvement of mine. Do not forbid me to grace my relation with yr name. Let me indulge the satisfaction of talking of you as posterity will do.

"In the mean time, can I make bold to interest you to make some use of yr interest in Ireland about some subscriptions for the *Henriade*, wch is almost ready and does not come out yet for want of a little help. The subscriptions will be but one guinea in hand.

" I am with the highest esteem and the utmost gratitude, Sir,

" Your most humble and most obedient servant,

" VOLTAIRE."

The *Henriade*, " printed on Royal Paper with large Cuts," was published, with an English dedication to Queen Caroline, in March, 1728—more than ten years after the inception of the poem, and five years after the unauthorised printing of *The League* at Rouen. It was to be had at Messrs Woodman and Lyons in Russell Street for three guineas. The book sold well, its fame spread rapidly, and three printings of a cheaper octavo edition were sold out in three weeks.

This poem, conceived in tribulation, polished, revised and elaborated again and again, banned by the very country whose great hero it was to celebrate, and issuing at last from a place of exile, seemed to its author the best of all his works, and it remained always the one for which he felt the most affection. To us, the story of the poem is more interesting than the actual performance. But then, we have no liking for epics. History in verse, no matter how ingenious the verse may be, does not move us. We cannot hear the trumpeting in the heavens, or see the angels of victory descending upon earth. Our national emblems are mere trade-marks ; our kings are very like ordinary men. How many of us, now, would care to read the *Henriade* ? The glory of the epic has long departed, and all the grand figures have flown away. Only in melodrama, perhaps, and then only in the part of the villain, do we still find a personage whose actions fill us with delight and astonishment. We do not doubt the sincerity of a villain. We are not quite so sure of a hero.

But in 1728, epics were in vogue. The *Henriade* was considered "the best epick Poem of the year." The royal family headed the list of subscribers, and no one who thought himself a man of taste, or who wished others to think he was, could afford to be without a copy. Few poems have been commercially more successful; though here, as in the case of so many later writings, the rumours which gathered about the author himself were of no small service in helping to sell his work.

Before the end of March, Voltaire was embroiled with a publisher named Prevost, who had a shop in Southampton Street, and was a well known distributor of French books in London. The quarrel and the transaction which led to it are both obscure. Prevost advertised, "by the author's privilege," a new edition of the great epic, which, he said, was "not emasculated" as the original quarto and octavo editions were, and which contained "a Criticism upon the whole Work." The advertisement appeared in the *Daily Post* of the 19th of March, and in the next day's issue Voltaire published a refutation. He had never authorised Prevost. He had given leave to "one Coderc" to print an edition for his own benefit after the original edition was exhausted. Nor was this all. Prevost, he said, had printed "six bad and insignificant low lines," to be found, it is true, in a former edition of *The League*, but not by Voltaire. In place of these bad lines, readers would find "six others a great deal bolder and stronger" in the *Henriade*.

To this, Prevost retorted that he had the author's permission, given to Coderc, to print the new edition, and Coderc's assignment of the said permission to him, Prevost. As for the bad lines and the good lines, his edition had both. The public might judge whether

the new printing was not fully as correct as the *editio princeps*. Voltaire replied that Coderc had been instructed to destroy all the sheets in which the six bad lines had been printed, and that if he had not done so, he would call him to account. By the end of May, Voltaire and the publisher were openly reconciled, and the six bad lines were finally expunged.

It has been suggested, not without plausibility, that the whole episode was engineered with a view to advertisement. Voltaire was certainly capable of such a manœuvre, but the quarrel seems genuine enough. Coderc was a bookseller at the Pliny Head in Little Newport Street, near Leicester Fields. He had been of service to Voltaire in the printing of the quarto edition, and it was probably in return for this obligation that the poet granted him the right to print a limited edition for his own benefit. If Coderc transferred his right to Prevost, without observing the author's conditions, he was much to be blamed. Prevost was equally to be blamed for describing the authorised edition as "castrated"—a statement altogether without meaning, and one which could have done nothing but harm to Voltaire himself. Finally, there is an English letter from Voltaire to a French refugee, Desmaizeaux, which is not always quoted in connection with this affair, but is extremely pertinent. The letter is not dated; it must have been written, we think, not earlier than June:

"Sir,

"I hear Prevost hath a mind to bring you a second time as an evidence against me. He sais that I have told you I had given him five and twenty books for thirty guineas. I remember very well, Sr, I told

you at Rainbow's coffee house that I had given him twenty subscription receipts for the *Henriade* and received thirty guineas down. But I never meant to have parted with thirty copies at three guineas each for thirty one pounds. I have agreed with him upon quite another foot, and I am not such a fool (tho a writer) to give away all my property to a bookseller. Therefore I desire you to remember that I never told you of my having made so silly a bargain."

This letter, certainly never intended for publication, throws light on the character of Prevost, whose methods, however adroit from a business point of view, were scarcely those of an honourable man.

An early consignment of the *Henriade* was forwarded to Ireland, and the following undated letter to Swift was probably written at the end of March, or early in April. It is, like his other letters to Swift, in English :

" Sr,

" I sent the other day á cargo of French dullness to mylord Lieutenant. My lady Bollingbrooke has taken upon herself to send you one copy of the *Henriade*. She is desirous to do that honour to my book, and I hope the merit of being presented to you by her hands will be a commendation to it. However, if she has not done it already, I desire you to take one out of the cargo which is now at mylord Lieutenant. . . . I have not seen Mr Pope this winter, but I have seen the third volume of the *Miscelanea*, and the more I read yr works, the more I am ashamed of mine."

Swift used his recommendation to some effect, and the *Henriade* had a ready sale in Ireland.

No sooner was the great national epic printed than its author was again considering how he could improve it ; he was devising " many alterations and corrections which would do good to the work."

This continual repolishing of his work was one of the most peculiar of his literary habits. If he had a particular fondness for any of his pieces, he could never leave it alone. We have seen him raging over six bad lines in the Prevost edition ; but a single line, a single word, if it struck him as awkward or questionable, had to be removed or changed. And the great majority of these corrections or improvements were made after the work had been printed. In some cases, the alterations were due to a personal reason, as, for example, the removal of de Sully's name from the *Henriade*, in revenge for de Sully's attitude in the affair of Rohan-Chabot. Yet he wrote with extraordinary speed. A tragedy was dashed off in a few weeks, sometimes in a few days. His production is almost without parallel.

It may have been that his style was impaired by this very facility and quickness, and that he was himself aware of his failure to attain the smooth elegance of La Bruyère or Montesquieu. In any case, we find with him the nervous anxiety, the teasing cares, of a man who could never leave well alone ; a man who was always pruning, patching, trimming and snipping his work, so that it might become excellent beyond all imaginable excellence. The hand which made it mighty was to make it mightier yet ; the straining and striving could never come to an end. In this, no doubt, the impulse was not altogether literary. He desired greatly to see the astonishment and to hear the applause of his fellows.

The curious literary history of the *Henriade* is

developed in several interesting letters written during the spring and summer of 1728. The first of these is presumably addressed to des Alleurs, and is undated. It is written throughout in English :

"Dear Sir,

"I received lately two letters of yours, one directed to Lord Peterborough's and the other to Lord Bolingbroke's. . . . I have sent this morning by the packet-boat a bundle of three copies of the *Henriade*, with your direction upon it. . . . If they are left at the Custom-house at *Paris* you may claim them, and they will be delivered to you. . . . One of the books is for Thiériot, though he has utterly forgot me, and does not write one single word either in French or in English. He may get a good deal of money by printing it in France. But in case he attempts it I must at least be acquainted with his design, and I will send him many alterations and corrections which will do good to the work and more to him. . . . Though the poem is written in a language not much admired here in regard to poetry, yet three editions have been made in less than three weeks, which I assure you I attribute intirely to the lucky subject I have pitched upon, and not at all to the performance. I do not send you yet my great edition, because I am really afraid of having not copies enough to answer the calls of the subscribers. . . .

"I heartily wish to see you and my friends, but I had rather see them in England than in France. You, who are a perfect Briton, you should cross the Channel and come to us. I assure you again that a man of your temper would not dislike a country where one obeys to the laws only and to one's whims. Reason is free here and walks her own way. Hypochondriacks es-

pecially are welcome. No manner of living appears strange. We have men who walk six miles a day for their health, feed upon roots, never taste flesh, wear a coat in winter thinner than your ladies do in the hottest days : all that is accounted a particular reason, but taxed with folly by nobody."

Early in May he wrote to Thiériot (in English) :

" As to the *Henriade*, I think you may easily get a private licence of printing it : I intend in about a fortnight to ask that licence. In the mean time you must go to M. Hérault, the *lieutenant de police*. I have already sent a copy of the *Henriade* to him, and intreated him to seize all the copies which might steal into France till I had leave from the government to publish the book. I have assured him I would never send into France anything without the consent of the ministry ; therefore it will be very proper for you to speak to him in the same manner, and to inform him that the person you speak of [Desfontaines] undertakes an edition of the *Henriade*, contrary to my honour, to my interest and to the laws. . . . Depend upon it, the man will be terrified from his undertaking. In the mean time, we will get our private licence, and in case the license is granted, I advise you to make a bargain with some notable bookseller. . . . The bookseller must make two editions ; one in quarto, for my own account, and another in octavo for your benefit. But nothing can succeed to our advantage and to my honour, unless you go to M. Hérault, and implore his assistance against the interloper."

Desfontaines, who was then translating the English

Essay, evidently had his eye on the great epic. "I know of nothing so impertinent as to go about to translate me in spight of my teeth." The Abbé had to be "terrified" at all costs.

But Thiériot declined to print the *Henriade* from the copy in his possession. Voltaire thereupon determined "to give the publick, as soon as possible, the best edition I can of the *Henriade*, together with my true *Essay on Poetry*." It was at this time that he seems to have contemplated a visit to France, as we saw above.

Towards the end of the summer, Voltaire heard that Dr Richard Towne, who lived and worked in remote Barbadoes, had some thoughts of translating the epic into English. Little is known of the ingenious Towne, except that he wrote *A Treatise of the Diseases most frequent in the West Indies, and herein more particularly of those which occur in Barbadoes*, and that he was a friend of Sir Hans Sloane. The idea of having his work translated by this lonely West Indian doctor appealed to Voltaire, and he sent him an amusing letter. The letter, which is in English, was written at Wandsworth :

"Dear Sir,

"I received yesterday your kind and witty letter, which was sent to my lord Peterborough at the Bath. You do me the greatest honour I could ever boast of, in bestowing an Englis dress upon my French child. I receive the best reward of all my labours if you go on in the generous design of translating my undeserving work into a language which gives life and strength to all the subjects it touches. . . . I wish I could be the happy witness of your labour. I assure you, dear Sir, I am strongly tempted of coming to Barbadoes ; for as the *Henriade* wanted to be translated

by you, I want a warmer climate for my health, which grows worse and worse in England. . . . As I am talking to you about physick, I must acquaint you that doctor *Freind* is a dying for having outphisied himself : he took the other day ten ounces of herapicra at once, with some sene, and since that noble experiment he lies speechless. This must be looked upon as self-murther. . . . I hear this minute doctor *Freind* is dead, leaving behind him an ample fortune. . . ."

The precise date of Voltaire's return to France cannot be determined. He received permission to return, but not to enter Paris, early in 1729. At this time he was complaining bitterly of ill health and depression. There is some doubt as to the date of a letter which he wrote to Thiériot early in the year, nor is it certain whether, at the time of writing, he was in England or in France. In this letter he tells his friend that he hopes to be in Paris " about the fifteenth of March."

A visit to Paris would then have been unauthorised, and would have exposed him to the danger of arrest, for the official permit to return to Paris, signed by Maurepas and preserved in the archives of the Bastille, is dated the 9th of April. There follows the passage, already quoted, in which he speaks of " pleading the former leave for my excuse." The letter, begun in English, proceeds gloomily in French :

" Concerning your health, I cannot speak too emphatically ; I have known many evils ; I know by sad experience that sickness is the worst of all. Having the fever or the small-pox in passing is nought ; but to be oppress'd by langour for whole years together,

to see one's appetites fading, to have still enough life to wish to enjoy it and too little strength to do so, to become useless and intolerable to one's self, to die in detail—that is what I have suffered, and what has been more bitter to me than all my other sufferings. If you are in such a state of langour, you will find no cure in medicine ; I have there sought for one in vain, and I have found it only in nature. If I am still living after all that I have endured, and after the sorrows which have poison'd the few drops of blood which remained in this frail machine, I owe it solely to regime and exercise. The air in which I live is good for nothing ; I have been very ill here ; I arrived feeble. Moreover, I am born of sickly parents who died young ; and you know, in addition to all that, the agonies of mind which have made life so cruel to me ; yet, thanks to regime and exercise, I exist—and for me that is much. . . . Believe me, there is no happiness for our bodies in this world, but in the possession of five healthy senses, or for our minds, but in the possession of a friend. I fear that the man with whom you are living [M. de Nocé] has learnt from the late Duke of Orleans to love good cheer too well : if men would but live as the poor do, there would be no need for doctors."

It is strange to find one who was so restless and so active complaining of langour. But he wrote always in the present sense of his moods ; moods changing, not only from day to day, but from hour to hour. Whatever he imagined himself to be, he was ; and it was this instability, this quick rearrangement of the whole personal complex, which made him at once so interesting and so dangerous. It seems to us not improbable that the letter was written soon after his

return to France, when he found himself in a state of disturbing transition : repatriated, but not wholly pardoned. This appears to be also the opinion of Lucien Foulet, whose edition of the letters of this period is the only one which has any real authority. The letter ends with the mysterious words in English : " I have nothing to say to you from the place where I am. Malaffaire does not know me : I am here upon the footing of an English traveller."

But the dating of the correspondence of this period is a matter of difficulty, and one upon which the editors are not in agreement. The same difficulty occurs frequently in the course of the correspondence : not only was Voltaire careless enough in dating his letters, when he dated them at all, but his editors have been equally careless in ignoring their natural order.

In a letter which is dated the 10th of March by Voltaire himself he says : " In all likelihood I will stay at Saint-Germain, and there I intend to arrive before the fifteenth." Where had he been previously ? On the 25th of March he was certainly at Saint-Germain, and to this place he invites friend Thiériot : " If you can forget a few days your golden palace, your feasts, and *fumum et opes strepitumque Romae*, you will find a homely frugal fare, a hard bed, a poor room ; but here is a friend who expects you."

The problem of these obscure movements is further complicated by a note dated the 1st of April, in which he says that he appeared " like a hobgoblin " to the Duke de Richelieu in Paris. The note was clearly written in Paris, whence he was returning in two hours' time to Saint-Germain. And in a letter which, though dated the 2nd of March and printed under this date by Moland, was obviously written after this flying

and secret visit to Paris, and is correctly ascribed to the 2nd of April by Foulet, he says : " Before I went out of Paris I received, at M. Cavalier's house, a letter written to me by Cardinal Fleury, which was sent to London, and back from London to Paris."

What were his motives in thus entering the capital by stealth ? First, beyond a doubt, the recovery of 500 livres of the queen's pension, already promised by secretary Pallu. He was also anxious to bargain for the publication of his *Charles XII*, and to obtain a few final particulars of the king's life. Thiériot is asked to visit the Swedish ambassador, " or his secretary, or his chaplain, or his whore," and to ask any of them for certain information of which he is in need.

On the 4th of April he sent a note to friend Thiériot at 8 o'clock in the morning. He was again in Paris, and had " something of importance " to communicate. " I am leading the life of a Rosicrucian, always rambling and always concealed, but not pretending to wisdom. *Quanquam o !* "

By the middle of the month, having received permission from Maurepas, he openly installed himself in Paris, taking rooms in the Rue Traversière-Saint-Honoré (now the Rue Molière). He advised Thiériot of his new address. " 'Tis near the last houses on the left on the side of the fountain—one of the worst-looking doors."

From this address he wrote, in English, a graceful letter of acknowledgement to one of his English friends, Mrs William Clayton, a lady of the bedchamber to Princess Caroline :

" Madam,

" Tho I am out of London the favours yr Ladiship has honoured me with are not, nor ever will

be, out of my memory. I'll remember as long as I live that the most respectable lady who waits and is a friend of the most truly great queen in the world has vouchsafed to protect me and receive me with kindness while I was at London. I am just now arrived in Paris and I pay my respects to your Court before I see my own. I wish for the honour of Versailles and for the improvement of virtue and letters we could have some ladyes like you. You see my wishes are unbounded ; so is the respect and the gratitude I am with, Madam,

" Yr most humble obed. servant,

" VOLTAIRE."

Before any attempt to reckon the effects of the visit to England upon his mind and character, it is well to remember what Voltaire brought with him when he came to England, and then to consider the nature of his susceptibility and the characters of the men with whom he was on terms of intimate friendship. He brought with him a definite grievance against his own countrymen, and a readiness to believe in the sympathy and superiority of any other civilised people. That is commonly the attitude of those who know their own country too well. But however bright his impressions, however marked his response to a new environment, no impressions, no influence could ever lessen the sturdy independence of his mind. He had often the seeming indifference of those who are essentially mutable. He was, indeed, too sensitive, too easily moved by a passing scene or emotion, to be capable of receiving any lasting influence. Whatever was uncongenial was flung aside by his revolving egoism, as a spinning top flicks away the snippets of paper

which are thrown upon it. He could not be reckoned with. He was capable of extreme generosity ; but it was not safe to count on his generosity. He was capable of real, but not profound affection. No man was less adaptive or less able to compromise with himself. In what way, then, was he changed, if changed at all, by his residence in England ?

His English friends—Pope, Swift, Bolingbroke, Dodington and Peterborough—were no ordinary men. Falkener, perhaps, was an ordinary man ; but Falkener represented, to Voltaire, the hospitality and not the genius of England. Bishop Atterbury, whom he had met previously in France, was by no means an ordinary bishop. As for the high society which he occasionally met—the Claytons, Hervey and his beautiful wife, Lyttleton, Walpole and Mrs Howard—, it provided him only with such elegant entertainment as he could have found elsewhere. Clarke, with his metaphysical talk, probably had more influence than any of the others, but Clarke's personality was never congenial.

Voltaire himself tells us that he was impressed by the freedom of speech and letters in England. Men of letters were sought after and patronised by men of rank : Pope was the friend of Bolingbroke and Swift of Peterborough. He does not seem to have realised the exceptional characters of these men, or to have known that they were regarded with abhorrence by the greater number of their shocked countrymen. The Quakers were free, fearless and high-minded : but who loved the Quakers ?

It is true that he found, in England, none of that fearful bigotry which so widely prevailed in Catholic France. A more rational, and so a happier, life was possible. Superstition, though not extinct, had been

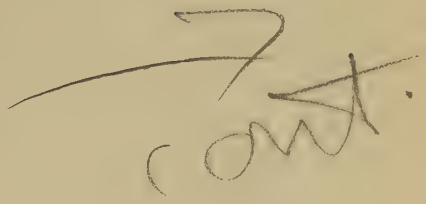
robbed of its grimmest horrors by the Reformation. What is more, diversity of schism was producing tolerance :

" An *Englishman*, as one to whom liberty is natural, may go to heaven his own way . . . every one is permitted to serve God in whatever mode or fashion he thinks proper. . . . That sable mix'd kind of mortal (not to be defin'd) who is neither of the clergy nor of the laity ; in a word, the thing call'd *Abbé* in *France*, is a species quite unknown in *England*. All the clergy here are very much upon the reserve, and most of them pedants. When these are told that in *France*, young fellows famous for their dissoluteness, and raised to the highest dignities of the church by female intrigues, address the fair publickly in an amorous way, amuse themselves in writing tender love-songs, entertain their friends very splendidly every night in their own houses, and after the banquet is ended, withdraw to invoke the assistance of the Holy Ghost, and call themselves boldly the successors of the apostles, they bless God for their being Protestants. But there are shameless Hereticks, who deserve to be blown hence through the flames to old Nick, as *Rabelais* says ; and for this reason I don't trouble myself about them."

But however much he may have appreciated the institutions of England, we can hardly say that he was radically changed by his visit. The preparation of the *Henriade*, the writing of *Brutus* and the *History of Charles XII*, show no change of literary habit and no trace of a foreign influence. The *Letters Concerning the English People*, rewritten after his return to France, are

occasional pieces in the true sense of the word : a set of essays upon typical Voltairean themes.

Two of our greatest men—Locke and Newton—certainly influenced him, and even influenced him profoundly; but he knew them only through their works, and to obtain those works it was not necessary to visit England.



CHAPTER III

MADAME DU CHÂTELET

AFTER his return to France, Voltaire was concerned, first of all, with repairing his fortunes. In this he was remarkably successful. He obtained the arrears of his pension ; and then, by two daring transactions in State bonds and lotteries, he became, in the course of a few weeks, a man of considerable wealth. He had all the shrewdness and quick understanding of a skilled financier. During his lifetime he secured an immense sum of money, not by his writings, but by brilliant financial diplomacy, guided by an extraordinary sense of coming developments and by a knowledge of the men with whom he was dealing.

The first year after his arrival in Paris (1729–1730) seems to have been a year of sustained labour, and a year of comparative retirement. The tragedy of *Brutus* was played on the 11th of December, 1730. It was well received on the first night, but the success was not repeated on the following nights, and the play was withdrawn.

Meanwhile the *Henriade* was in trouble again. The London edition was proscribed in France, and sheets of the book were being smuggled over as the wrapping of bales and packets. Marais, not suspecting the stratagem, had seen with malicious amusement a copy of the *Life of Bayle* wrapped in a sheet of the great epic. All the copies intended for the French subscribers were seized and destroyed at Calais. At the same time, Voltaire was devising a new and improved edition ; he was also drafting the tragedies of *Eriphyle* and *Caesar*.

On the 20th of March, 1730, Voltaire was called away

from his work to the death-bed of one of his friends, the famous actress Adrienne Lecouvreur. Five days before her death she had played the part of Jocasta in *Oedipus*, though suffering greatly ; and on the following night she had bravely and brilliantly played an even more exacting rôle in *The Florentine*. "She died," wrote Voltaire, "in my arms" ; and he repudiated with indignation the rumour that she had taken poison. The curé of Saint-Sulpice refused the right of burial in consecrated earth : it would appear, indeed, that he actually turned the funeral cortège from the gates of the cemetery. In this deplorable action he was supported by the authority of the Archbishop of Paris. At midnight, an old hackney coach, attended by two porters, conveyed the body of poor Adrienne to a piece of waste ground known by the evil name of La Grenouillère, and there it was buried. Such were the orders of Hérault, the chief of police.

Adrienne Lecouvreur, perhaps the greatest actress of her time, a woman of rare generosity, charming, gallant, never ignoble and never treacherous, neither more nor less free than any great lady of the period, was thus dishonoured by the church. Voltaire was not alone in his rage. The friends of Adrienne—and they were many—felt, with him, both fury and amazement. Here, in truth, was a sad enough example of priestly malice and of the ugly power of superstition. The episode produced one of Voltaire's most vigorous poetical satires—*The Death of Mademoiselle Lecouvreur*. It strengthened him in the grim, unending fight against the inhumanity, the corruption and the hypocrisy of something which was then called religion.

In 1731, the *History of Charles XII* was produced. The first volume was approved, the second was banned,

and the whole edition confiscated. The Keeper of the Seals, in giving a reason for this procedure, alleged that the author had not treated the Elector of Saxony with proper respect. Voltaire thereupon withdrew to Rouen with his manuscript, had the book secretly printed, and conveyed to Paris by the servants of the Duke de Richelieu. He told his friends that he had gone to England, and pretended to write from Canterbury ; in Rouen he tried to pass as an English gentleman upon his travels. He lived in the house of the bookseller, Jore, a shifty and troublesome fellow, with whom he was later embroiled. Returning to Paris in the autumn, he finished the tragedies of *Eriphyle* and *Caesar*.

Eriphyle was presented, with only a moderate degree of success, on the 7th of March, 1732. It seemed as though Voltaire was never to repeat the triumph of *Oedipus*. But five months later, on the 13th of August, the fine new tragedy of *Zaïre* was a far greater triumph.

At the first hearing, the reception was doubtful. Confused voices were heard in the parterre, some applauding and others unfavourable. The actors were not inspired. Certain faults in the construction, a certain halting of the rhythm, were clear to the author, and these were accordingly mended. On the fourth night, the success of the piece was overwhelming. The actors realised the full emotional value of their lines ; the house responded warmly ; and when Voltaire showed himself in one of the boxes he received a most gratifying ovation. Having thus obtained so delightful a proof of their good taste, he felt himself reconciled once more with his own countrymen, and honoured by their frank applause. He felt his energies greater than ever before, and set about his work with an even greater degree of ardour and confidence. In a

letter to Formont, written in September, he gives an account of his plans :

" What a deal of pains and pother for this bubble of vain glory ! And yet, what should we do without this chimera ? 'Tis as needful for the spirit as nourishment for the body. I mean to recast *Eriphyle* and the *Death of Caesar*—all for the sake of this *bubble*. Meanwhile, I am obliged to work at some additions which I am preparing for a Dutch edition of *Charles XII.* . . , When I have washed my hands of this ungrateful task. I shall complete the *English Letters*, which you have seen ; it will be at most a month's labour ; after that I must indeed return to the theatre, and finish, at last, with the history of the *Age of Louis XIV*."

He had also published his *Epistle to Urania*, written, it will be remembered, for that fair unbeliever, Rupelmonde ; whereupon the Archbishop of Paris made a complaint to Hérault, who so often found himself concerned with the doings of Arouet de Voltaire.

The chief of police summoned the poet, and asked him if he was truly the author of this wicked, anti-religious poem. Voltaire did not hesitate to ascribe it to the Abbé Chaulieu, who had died some years previously, one of the roystering company of the Temple. No one believed this ; but the matter was dropped. Secretary Langlois declared warmly that " Voltaire ought to be locked up in a place where he could have neither pen, ink, nor paper : *a man of this humour is capable of destroying a kingdom*."

If the clergy was incensed by the *Epistle*, men of letters were equally incensed by a deliciously arrogant satire—*The Temple of Taste*. Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, in particular, was exposed to ridicule in the *Temple*; and he replied with a venomous epigram. Such warfare was

then common enough among writers, and provided the age with one of its literary amusements. Writing had not yet become a purely commercial enterprise, and publishing was full of adventures and perils.

Early in 1733, the death of Madame de Fontaine-Martel deprived Voltaire of his comfortable quarters (he had been living in her house) and of " 40,000 livres spent upon his diversion." In May, he moved to the house of a flour merchant, Desmoulin, in the Rue du Long-Pont. It was a shabby house, but it gave him the privacy and convenience of rooms of his own. Here he was free to work, or to receive company, as he pleased. He found himself, so he said, " in the worst house in the worst quarter of Paris, more deafened than a sacristan by the noise of bells " ; but then—" I shall make such a twanging with my lyre that I shan't care a fig for the noise of the bells."

He was ill (but when was he not ill ?) and exceedingly busy setting up house, buying and hanging pictures, revising his plays, all the time suffering " like a damned soul." Yet even here this extraordinary man showed that he had an eye for business : he was anxious to speculate in the export of grain, and Desmoulin became his agent.

A sentimental reason may also have played a part in his choice of a dwelling ; for he was now close to the gate of Saint-Germain, which he had celebrated as a masterpiece of architecture in the *Temple of Taste*.

In the dingy rooms of the Rue du Long-Pont, with Flemish pictures on the walls, and some very doubtful Titians, he received many visitors. Among them was Madame la Marquise du Châtelet.

This remarkable woman was then twenty-seven years old. She had married du Châtelet in 1725, six months

before her nineteenth birthday. Her husband was one of those men who are so obligingly insignificant that they pass through life without leaving behind them a word or an action that need be recorded. He lived in a very dilapidated château, and amused himself amiably and obscurely by planting a few trees, shooting a few duck, or riding nowhere in particular upon a bay horse. He was the least offensive and least intrusive of husbands, and never troubled himself about his wife's affairs, or indeed about any others.

Madame du Châtelet was no ordinary person. She was a generous ardent creature, anxious to enjoy in the highest degree not only the pleasures of the senses, but those of the intelligence. If she pursued her loves with intensity of purpose and a clear aim, she pursued with equal intensity of purpose the teaching of Newton or the speculation of Maupertuis. She was a fine Latinist, far advanced in mathematics, and above all in metaphysics. She learnt how to read, speak or write in English as readily as Voltaire himself. No one had a more profound acquaintance with the works of Leibnitz and Descartes. She knew Italian, could play the harpsichord and sing passably well. She was a talented amateur actress. In society, she was a gay and attractive figure, with a light, easy, or even trivial conversation. She had a liking for dainty dresses and pretty jewels. Never giving herself airs of superiority, but always ready to show enthusiasm for the topic or pastime of the moment, she would take up a hand of cards as readily as the last essay of Fontenelle. If her lover is to be believed, she spoke ill of no one. In all that she did, her warm, vital and impulsive nature was apparent. Free she may have been, but frank she certainly was, without malice in her mind or cruelty in her heart.

She was tall, of a rather masculine build ; her face was not beautiful, but abundantly charming ; her eyes large, soft and expressive. Probably she was not as alluring as we see her in the pastel of La Tour. Her portrait by the queen of cats, Madame du Deffand, is a harsh libel, without the excuse either of wit or of real observation.

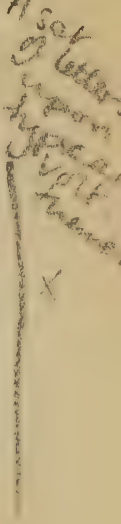
Madame du Châtelet had been the mistress of de Guébriant, of Richelieu, and perhaps of others. She loved seriously, ardently, and with tenderness. When de Guébriant deserted her, she tried to kill herself. With Richelieu, long after their intrigue, she remained on terms of loyal and open friendship. It was, perhaps, this virile quality of frankness, this honesty of word and action, which made Voltaire describe her, in later years, as " a great man in skirts," and which taught him to respect her memory and " to think not at all of her womanly weakness." For him, she was always " the divine Emilie."

In the summer of 1733, Voltaire addressed to Madame du Châtelet an *Ode on Calumny*, itself containing some of the vilest and most brutal calumny ever written. He had not forgotten Rousseau's epigram, and here, for twenty-five lines, he coarsely abuses the " old rhymer."

It is pleasant to be able to contrast with such acid malevolence the kindness which he showed at this time to two obscure and penniless young writers, Lefèvbre and Linant, both of whom he lodged and fed in his own house.

The tragedy of *Adélaïde du Guesclin*, presented on the 18th of January, 1734, was a failure, and had to be withdrawn after the first calamitous performance. In a changed form, and under another name, the play was

immensely successful in 1752. But the chief literary event of 1734 was the publication of the *English Letters* or *Lettres Philosophiques*, of which the English translation had already appeared, under Thiériot's supervision, in London. The sheets had been printed by Jore at Rouen some time previously ; the Keeper of the Seals, having heard something of this wicked and subversive work, sent an agent to Rouen to get hold of the books and to question the printer. Jore, advised of what was coming, was duly prepared. The ultimate publication of the *Letters* in their original form took place in circumstances which are now very obscure, but evidently without Voltaire's consent.



No sooner had the book made its appearance in Paris than the edition was seized, Voltaire's rooms in the Rue du Long-Pont were raided, and Jore was clapped into the Bastille. With picturesque barbarity, the book was publicly torn to pieces and burnt by the executioner.

To us, it seems odd enough that a work apparently so moderate in tone should have been the cause of such desperate measures. We must remember, that to advocate the unrestrained use of the reason, of the intelligence and of the critical instinct, was to oppose the inevitable, unvarying policy of the Catholic church; that a light or satirical method in dealing with the clergy of this, or indeed of any other, church was an offence of the most diabolical sort ; and that the toleration of schism, and above all of such a pernicious teaching as that of the Quakers, could not be endured by the authority of the State.

Voltaire was at Monjeu, celebrating the marriage of de Richelieu—a marriage of his own contrivance—, when he heard of what was going on in Paris. He took to his heels without delay. Such flights were not

infrequent. *Lettres de cachet* flew after him ; but he was not to be unearthed. After a daring visit to the French army of the Rhine at Philipsbourg, where his friend de Richelieu had been wounded in a duel, he came to Cirey, the home of the Marquis and Marquise du Châtelet.

From that time, and for many years, Cirey became the home of Voltaire.

The château of Cirey, about four miles from Vassy on the St-Dizier road, was in the pleasing and rural country of the Marne (Champagne). From Cirey to Paris was a distance of some hundred and thirty miles—a distance which, in those days, made rapid communication impossible. Here, there would be time to rest, to open negociations, and to make peace.

Du Châtelet made no objection to an arrangement which interfered in no way with his own dull, placid amusements, and which was not by any means unusual. Besides, Voltaire had just helped him to win a long and tedious lawsuit, and had thus been of use in repairing his decayed fortune. To have the good will of a man so adroit as Monsieur de Voltaire, and moreover so illustrious, was a benefit as well as a distinction. What is more, du Châtelet felt some of that admiration which the simple-minded so readily accord to those who write books.

As for Monsieur de Voltaire himself, he began, with the greatest energy and enthusiasm, to rebuild the house and to lay out new walks and terraces. You would have thought that everything belonged to him. The quiet, ruinous place was quickly over-run with masons, gardeners, architects, furnishers, painters, and what not. Madame du Châtelet posted off to Paris, not only to calm ruffled authorities and to obtain a pardon

for Voltaire, but to buy curtains, carpets, books, pictures, china, and a hundred pretty kickshaws. Voltaire described her return in a gay note to Madame de Champbonin (" pussy-cat "), one of their neighbours :

" Madame du Châtelet is here, having come back from *Paris* last evening. . . . She is surrounded by two hundred packages, which arrived here at the same time. We have beds without curtains, rooms without windows, china cabinets and no arm-chairs, charming phaetons, and no horses to draw them. Madame du Châtelet is laughing, adorable, in the midst of this disorder. She came in a sort of cart, bruised and shaken, without having slept, but in very good health. She commands me to send you a thousand compliments. We are patching up old tapestries. We are searching for curtains, we are making doors—all for your entertainment. And I vow, jesting apart, that you shall be mighty comfortable here."

Then, after a short absence from Cirey, he found the divine Emilie hard at work. " She is become an architect and a gardener," he wrote to Madame de Neuville. " She has put windows where I put doors ; she is changing the staircases into chimneys, and the chimneys into staircases ; she has had limes planted where I proposed elms ; and if I have dug an herb-garden, she has turned it into flower-beds. What's more, she has done the work of a fairy in the house. She turns rags into tapestries ; she has found the secret of furnishing Cirey with nothing."

For all that, the fairy's work seems to have been very substantial and very costly. Terraces, balustrades, gardens, required the labours of many men. Inside

the house, rooms, galleries and ante-chambers were being rebuilt or added ; rooms in yellow or blue or silver. There was a continual unpacking of china images, of books, pictures, apparatus, glasses, clocks, marabouts, brackets, lacquered tables, or rolls of " Indian paper." There was a " little statue " of the Farnese Hercules, and another of Venus. The bathroom (with its new porcelain bath) had to be paved with marble and lined with tiles. Panelling, painting, papering—there was no end to it.

Divine Emilie, tireless, radiant, and her strange lover, busied themselves day and night with these new toys, these delightful creations. Yet they found time, in the midst of all this enchantment, for an occasional game of chess, for many quarrels, much perusing of plans, many philosophical debates. We may well ask what had become of the husband, or what he thought of it all. No one knew. Du Châtelet, always obliging, had sunk below the horizon.

At table, the little son of the Marquise would make his appearance. Two amusing country ladies, Madame de Champbonin and Madame de Neuville, often visited Cirey and often received gallant notes from Voltaire : Madame de Champbonin acquired a room of her own at Cirey.

Madame du Châtelet was in Paris again at the end of the year, charged with many commissions by Voltaire. Here she must needs go to midnight Mass, and hear the " carols upon the organ." She had her box at the Opera, her place at cavagnole or quadrille. But her pleasures were quickly and willingly renounced so that she might look after a sick friend—poor Madame de Richelieu, who lay in bed with a fever. Even her return to Cirey had to be postponed. And at Cirey,

Voltaire was quarrelling with the workmen, afraid of being cheated, "burdened with details," and demanding the services of an agent.

Voltaire was now in his forty-first year. If he was not one of the most esteemed or most estimable men in France, he was certainly one of the most famous. His fame, indeed, had spread far beyond his own country, and was known to the whole world of letters. It was fame of a mixed and peculiar quality. Part of it was due to the notable success of *Oedipus*, of the *Henriade*, of *Charles XII* and *Zaïre*. Part was due to the light poems and satires which then appeared so scandalous and so daring. No doubt the quarrels with Rousseau and Desfontaines helped equally to build up his variegated reputation. But his fame rested then to a large extent, as it still does, upon a more intimate basis. Voltaire had become a name associated with the idea of a singular, violent and audacious personality. Voltaire had been in prison twice. He had been exiled. He had meddled in many things, and was the hero or the villain of many escapades. His friends were powerful and so were his enemies. In the general action of the period he was playing a part by no means inconspicuous and by no means without effect. He represented, with brilliance and precision, a new habit of thought which was becoming more and more congenial. He was a symbol, a legend. In reading or hearing his name, men were reminded, not so much of books or plays as of a man ; a strange, rather shocking and terrifying man, who would pull folk along with him in spite of themselves.

His health, if we are to believe his letters, was never worse. He suffered "frequent maladies," "long and

cruel maladies." His energy was never greater. That wicked grotesque, *La Pucelle—The Maid*—was being composed, and so was the tragedy of *Alzire*. The *Age of Louis XIV* was in preparation.

Physical science occupied much of his time, and he presently surrounded himself with all manner of glasses, engines, and instruments for optical or chemical research. In these matters, though he was better informed than most men of his time, he was only moderately successful. With all this, much letter-writing, many quarrels, and all the planning, devising, excitement of the new Cirey.

Early in March, 1735, he received from Hérault permission to return to Paris, on condition that he behaved properly. "The more talent you have, Sir," wrote Hérault, "the more clearly you should perceive that you have enemies and rivals. Silence them, once and for all, by conduct worthy of a wise man and of one who has already reached a certain age."

By the end of March, Voltaire was in Paris, where Madame du Châtelet awaited him. Hérault received a charming note from the "wise man," who told him that he had arrived "very ill"—otherwise he would have hastened to pay his court to the kind, fatherly and generous Hérault, that most benign chief of police. The reputation of being an invalid is sometimes a great convenience.

In May, he was at the court of Stanislas Leczinski, the ex-king of Poland, at Lunéville in Lorraine.

Stanislas was the father of the French queen. He was a gentle, bewildered man, then in his fifty-ninth year, who lived quietly with his placid mistress, Madame de Boufflers, and with a following of studious, obscure men who called themselves philosophers. He liked

to potter about in his grounds, devising rock-gardens or fountains or little houses.

To Voltaire, the chief attraction of the court of Lunéville was a laboratory. Physical science was then the fashion at Lunéville ; dainty dabblers like Madame de Richelieu (now recovering from her illness) would prattle of Newtonian principles, or gaze with round eyes at the wonders of an astrolabe. From this strange court, to be associated, later, with the greatest tragedy of his own life, Voltaire wrote to Thiériot :

" My dear correspondent, here am I in a court and yet no courtier. I hope to live here like those household mice, who lead a gay life, without ever making the acquaintance either of the master or of the family. I am not made for princes, even less for princesses. 'Tis well enough for Horace to say

Principibus placuisse viris non ultima laus est,

I shall never deserve that praise. There is an admirable physician here call'd Varinge, who, from being a locksmith's apprentice, has become a worthy philosopher, thanks to nature and to the encouragement of the Duke of Lorraine. . . . There is also one Duval, the librarian, who, once a peasant, is now a man of learning, and whom the same Duke of Lorraine met one day as he was looking after his sheep and studying geography. You may well believe that these are the great ones of the world to whom I shall pay my court ; add one or two intelligent Englishmen, who ('tis said) have become human enough to speak."

A more detailed and more diverting account was given in a letter to Formont, written after Voltaire's return to Cirey :

"How now ! my good philosopher ; 'tis long enough since I have had a word with you. I have been at the court of Lorraine, but you may well doubt if I have play'd the courtier. They have there a most admirable establishment for those sciences which are but little known and less cultivated. 'Tis a great hall, furnished with all the newest machines, and especially with those which display the Newtonian system. There is near a thousand crown's worth of engines of all sorts. A simple locksmith, become philosopher, and sent to England by the late Duke of Lorraine, has made the greater number of these machines with his own hands, and shows them with much acuteness. There is nothing in *France* to be compar'd with this establishment ; and all that it has in common with *French* ways, is the neglect with which it is treated by the little court of Lorraine. 'Tis the fate of kings and courtiers to have good things to their hand, and not to perceive 'em. They are like blind men in a gallery of paintings. Go to what court you please, you'll always find *Versailles*. But I must tell you, to the honour of our court of *Versailles* and the honour of our ladies, that Madame de Richelieu has taken a course of physicks in this hall of machines ; that she has become a pretty good *Newtonian*, and that she has confounded publickly a certain Jesuit preacher who knew nought save words, and who took on himself to argue, like a vain babbler, against proof and against intelligence. He was cried down, with his rhetorick, and Madame de Richelieu was the more admir'd because she is a woman and a duchess."

Voltaire was not to occupy himself for long with these peaceful amusements. The performance of *Caesar* at the Harcourt College in August led to a quarrel with

Desfontaines ; and there was another with the fatuous Lefranc de Pompignan, whose conceit exposed him, later, to the deadly ridicule of his enemy.

With all these affairs and labours, he found time for his usual immense correspondence. Among those to whom he wrote were two old Jesuit fathers, d'Olivet and Tournemine, who had been his teachers when he was a boy at Louis-le-Grand. During his visit to England, he had written to another of these old men, Father Porée.

In these letters we find the unaffected kindness and gratitude which Voltaire could feel as truly as any other. He sought, indeed, to draw Tournemine into a long polemic upon the nature of the soul and the properties of the elusive *être pensant*. " My very dear and reverend Father," he wrote to him, " I have always loved truth, and I have always sought her in good faith." It is clear that he valued the intelligence of Father Tournemine as highly as he valued his good will and friendship. He put his questions carefully.

The good father replied with Latin verses, with some old-fashioned arguments about the divisibility of matter, and with various theological subtleties concerning the personal and the immaterial.

Voltaire answered the letter with grace and kindly sentiment. " My dear Father, the unalterable friendship with which you honour me is indeed worthy of such a heart as yours ; it will be precious to me all the days of my life. I beg you to receive the renewed assurances of my own, and to assure Father Porée, also, of the gratitude which I shall always owe him. You have both taught me to love virtue, truth and letters. Be kind enough to assure the reverend Father Brumoy of my sincere esteem. I do not know the Father Moloni or Father Rouillé of whom you speak to me ; but if

they are your friends, they must be men of merit." Then, gently advocating the principles of Newton, he showed that he was unconvinced, either by Tournemine's physics or by his theology. "If ever I find some one who can prove to me, by pure reason, the spirituality and immortality of the soul, I shall be eternally obliged to him."

The letter to Father d'Olivet was of a lighter kind :

"My dear Abbé, do you know that I reproach myself, indeed, for having let slip so much of my life without profiting from your amiable conversation ? In all the world, you are the man to whom I owe most, and whom I have seen the least. I vow to you, that if ever I quit the happy retreat in which I live, it will be to make a better use of my time. I love the sanity of the ancients, I devour what is good among the moderns, but I set before all the sweetness of friendship. All this is to be found with you. Permit me, then, to relish some part of these many excellent things in your letters, whilst I await the moment for seeing you. What you call my *Ariosto* [*La Pucelle*] is a folly by no means as long as his ; *non ho pigliato tante coglionerie*. I should have been ashamed to have devoted thirty *cantos* to these whimsies and to these debauches of the imagination. I have but ten *cantos* in my *Maid* Joan. So that I'm at least two-thirds wiser than *Ariosto*. These diversions are the interludes of my work. I find that one has time for everything if one is ready to make use of it. My chief occupation at present is that fair *Age of Louis XIV*. Pitched battles, revolutions, are the least part of this design ; squadrons or battalions victorious or beaten, towns captured or recaptured, are matters of all history ; the age of Louis XIV, in war and

politicks, has no advantage over the others. . . . Take away the arts and the progress of thought in this age, and you will find nothing remarkable, nothing which ought to receive the attention of posterity. . . . Have you heard that I had *The Death of Caesar* play'd the other day at the Harcourt College—a tragedy of my own making, in which there are no women? But it has certain verses of the sort people used to write sixty years ago. I am mighty anxious that you should see this work. It has a *Roman* ferocity. Our young ladies would think it horrible; one could scarce recognize the authour of the tender *Zaïre*."

Bearing the same date as the above (24th of August, 1735) is a particularly happy letter written to Berger:

"Your letters add a new charm to the pleasures which I enjoy in the Solitude to which I have retir'd, far from the braying, naughty and miserable world; far from bad poets and bad criticks. I had a thousand times rather hear from you of what is passing than be a witness of it. There is a multitude of events which weary the spectator, but which become interesting when they are well related. Your letters embellish the follies of the age. I read them to a loveable lady, worthy of respect, whose taste is universal; your letters please her infinitely. I am well content with this little treachery towards you, so that I may engage you to write more often. If 'twas only myself read your letters, I would not pray you to favour me with one each day in the interest of my pleasure alone; but since they are the delight of one whom all the world desires to please, your own pride should now be engaged.

"Tell me if the great musician, *Rameau*, is also

maximus in minimis, and if, from the sublimity of his grand musick, he descends with success to the simple graces of the ballet. I could wish *Newton* had made vaudevilles ; I would have esteem'd him the more. He who has but one talent cannot be a great genius ; he who has several is more to be loved. 'Tis apparently because I am the very humble Servant of those who touch at once the two extremes, that I have been etch'd by the side of M. de Fontenelle. My friend Thiériot has had himself painted with the *Henriade* in his hand. If I had a copy of this portrait, I'd have my friend and my mistress in one frame. Tell me if you see him sometimes at the *Opera*, and reproach him for his laziness in writing."

To Falkener, appointed to the embassy at Constantinople, he wrote in English :

" My dear friend, your new title will change neither my sentiments nor my expressions. My dear Falkener, friendship is full of talk, but it must be discreet. In the hurry of business you are in, remember only I talk'd to you, about seven years ago, of that very same ambassy. Remember I am the first man that did foretell the honour you enjoy. . . . If you pass through France on your way to Constantinople, I advise you I am but twenty leagues from Calais, almost in the road to Paris. The castle is called Cirey. . . . There lives a young lady called the marquise du Châtelet, whom I have taught English to, and who longs to see you."

In all these letters we have the most human, the kindliest and more generous side of Voltaire's character. His letters to the Jesuit fathers show that his war against

orthodox religion was not war of an indiscriminate kind, and certainly not a war against individuals, unless individuals were cruel, offensive or treacherous.

The year 1736 is marked by the great success of the American tragedy *Alzire*, played first on the 27th of January, and then for twenty consecutive nights. There were two special court performances, one on the 21st of February and the other on the 15th of March. Even that slippery villain, Desfontaines, praised the tragedy in high terms, and professed a warm admiration for the author.

Voltaire himself did not leave Cirey to witness the triumph of his new piece. He was unwell. Madame du Châtelet sat by his bedside, reading aloud from Cicero and Pope. Thiériot was requested to send the news from Paris : " Tell me, good friend, with your wonted candour and without fear, all that folk are saying about me. Be very sure I shall make none but a good use of it, that I shall but consider how to silence evil and how to encourage good. Let me know, without scruples, my friends and my enemies, so that I may compel these latter not to hate me, and make myself worthy of the others." A few days later, in a letter to an unknown correspondent, he said that his health " had become deplorable."

On the 22nd of February, 1736, he wrote one of the liveliest of his English letters to Falkener, who was then at Constantinople :

" Now the honest, the good and plain Philosopher of *Wandsworth*, represents his king and country, and is equal to the Grand Seignior. Certainly England is the only country where commerce and virtue are to be

rewarded with such an honour. . . . Had I not regulated my life after a way which makes me a kind of *solitaire*, I would fly to that nation of savage slaves, whom I hate, to see the man I love. What would my entertainment be ! and how full the overflowings of my heart, in contemplating my dear Falkener, amidst so many Infidels of all hues, smiling with his humane philosophy at the superstitious follies that reign on the one side at *Stamboul*, and on the other at *Galata* ! I would not admire, as milady Mary Worthley Montagu says

> The vizir proud, distinguished from the rest ;
> Six slaves in gay attire his bridle hold,
> His bridle rich with gems, his stirrups gold !

For, how the devil ! should I admire a slave upon a horse ? My friend Falkener I should admire !

" But I must bid adieu ! to the great town of Constantinople, and stay in my little corner of the world, in that very same castle where you were invited to come in your way to Paris. . . . Your taking an other way, was certainly a sad disappointment for me, and especially to that lady who makes use of your *Locke* and of more of your other books. Upon my word ! a French lady who reads *Newton*, *Locke*, *Addison* and *Pope*, and who retires from the bubbles and the stunning noise of Paris, to cultivate in the country the great and amiable genius she is born with, is more valuable than your Constantinople and all the *Turkish* empire !

" You will see, perhaps, a renegado, the bastard offspring of an Irishman who went to Paris, by the name of Mac-Carthy ; a busy, bold, stirring and not a scrupulous man. He had the honour, by chance, of being known to the marquise du Châtelet ; but was expelled from her house for his rogueries and impudence,

before he left Paris, with two young men in debt, whom he seduced to turn musulmen. . . . I would fain know what sort of life he leads now with the followers of Mohammed. But, what concerns me much more, what I long to be informed of is, whether you are as happy as you seem to be. Have you got a little private *seraglio* ? Or are you to be married ? Are you overstoked with business ? . . . Do you drink too much of that good Cyprus wine ? For my part, I am here too happy, though my health is ever very weak."

In March, he was himself " overstoked with business." *Louis XIV* was nearly completed. " Barche is going to print *Zaïre* ; I am correcting it. Prault is re-printing the *Henriade* ; I am correcting that also. I correct all, save myself. Do you know, that I am retouching *Adelaide*, and that she will be one of the least unseemly of my daughters ? "

And now came a truly vexatious episode. Bookseller Jore, we remember, had been clapped into the Bastille for having dared to print the *Lettres Philosophiques*. Voltaire, in his blue and silver room at Cirey, had, no doubt, ceased to trouble himself about bookseller Jore. But Jore now reminded him of his obligations in a singularly unpleasant fashion. Hérault, he said, was prepared to release him and to restore his rights, if he would tell the whole truth about the offending book ; but of course he could say nothing without the consent of M. de Voltaire. This was a pitfall, but it was one which, with all his cunning and suspicion, Voltaire did not perceive until it was too late. Moved by pity, he sent Jore a careful account of the entire transaction. Thereupon the bookseller put forward a claim for his expenses—one thousand five hundred livres.

In the sorry and sordid quarrel which followed, neither side appeared to advantage. The poet hurried to Paris. To Jore and his terrible *factum*, he replied with a *counter-factum* in which he tried to prove that he owed nothing at all. But if Jore was wrong in bullying and threatening, if he had weakly and treacherously lent himself to the enemies of Voltaire, if his terrible *factum* was full of idle and irrelevant gossip, of mere spite, Voltaire was not less in the wrong when he attempted to disclaim all liability. Matters were finally settled in consideration of the sum of five hundred livres paid, nominally, as compensation to Jore. The Jore affair, cloudy and squalid like all commercial disputes, did Voltaire an infinite amount of harm with the public, and we may suppose that the bookseller was not unassisted by the personal enemies of the poet. The *factum*, libellous as it may be, and dishonest in intention as it certainly was, is clearly the work of a practised writer, and Jore was no writer. Nor was this his only vexation, for Rousseau published, against him, a very bitter and malicious pamphlet.

A more pleasing diversion, and one which was later to have tremendous results, was the arrival of a letter, dated the 8th of August, from Frederick, the Crown Prince of Prussia.

The great Frederick was then a youth of twenty-four, with all the glowing enthusiasm of a young intelligent mind, and with a touch of diplomatic subtlety. Like the older and greater man to whom he was writing, he had a more than ordinary share of mental energy, and a more than ordinary desire to learn and appreciate both art and science. He spoke and wrote in French habitually, despising German as the language of boors.

Our divine Emilie, however proud she may have been, must have read the letter with some little uneasiness.

Here was a rival indeed (the only one she had ever cause to fear), and one to whose impulsive advances the poet could not be insensible. The favour of a wise and generous prince, such as Frederick appeared to be, a new Marcus Aurelius—the allusion was bound to come—, and the prospect of alliance with one who was clearly destined to become a great captain and a great ruler, a patron of learning and letters and one whose decisive part in history was assured, were powerful attractions for a man as ambitious, as eager for renown as Voltaire.

"Sir," wrote Frederick, "although I have not the satisfaction of knowing you personally, you are none the less known to me by your works. They are treasures of the spirit, if one may so express oneself—pieces wrought with such taste, such delicacy, such art, that their beauties appear new each time one reads them. . . . You add to the qualities of an excellent poet an infinity of various learning which, truly, hath some affinity with poetry, but which your pen has brought to it for the first time. Never before has a poet bestow'd rhythm upon metaphysickal thoughts. . . . The kindness and support which you show to all those who devote themselves to the arts and sciences make me hope that you will not exclude me from the number of those whom you find worthy of your instructions." Then came flowery praises of the *Henriade*, *Caesar*, and *Alzire*. "Corneille, the great Corneille, he who won the united admiration of his age, if he came to life again, would see with amazement, and perhaps with envy, that the Tragick Muse showers profusely upon you the favours she gave so grudgingly to him. What may we not expect from the Authour of such Masterpieces! What new marvels are to come

from the pen which has design'd *The Temple of Taste* with such spirit and with such elegance ! " He begs him to send all his works, even those which are unpublished. He will respect the confidence. " I know, unhappily, that the word of princes is a thing of small count in these days ; but I hope, none the less, that you will not concern yourself with a general prejudice, and that you will make an exception to the rule in my favour. . . . If my destiny is not kind enough to enable me to possess you, at least I may hope to see one day him whom I have admir'd so long and from so far, and to assure you with my own voice that I am, with all the esteem and consideration due to those who, following the Torch of Truth as their Guide, devote their labours to the publick weal, Sir, your affectionate friend,

" Federic."

" Federic "—the very name had to be softened, hushed to please the sensitive ear of the poet.

Voltaire was not slow in answering :

" Sire, one would need to be insensible, not to be infinitely touch'd by the letter with which Your Royal Highness has deigned to honour me. My self-love has been too greatly flatter'd ; but the love of mankind, which I have ever preserved in my heart, and which, if I may dare to say it, has form'd my character, has given me a pleasure a thousand times more pure, when I see that the world has a Prince who thinks like a Man, a Prince Philosopher who will make men happy. . . . I behold, Sire, with the joy of a heart full of love for the publick good, the immense distance which you have plac'd between men who seek the truth in peace, and those who desire to make war with words which they

do not understand. I see that Newton, Leibnitz, Locke, Bayle, those souls so high, so sweet and full of light, are those who feed your mind, and that you reject that other pretended nourishment, which you would find poisoned or without substance." But he is loyal to Emilie. "I should think it a good fortune indeed if I could come to pay my respects to Your Royal Highness. One goes to *Rome* to see the churches, the pictures, the ruins and the statues. A Prince such as you is far worthier of a pilgrimage; 'tis a rarity more marvellous. But affection, which holds me in the retreat where I am living, does not permit me to leave it. You think, no doubt, like Julian, that great man who was so slander'd, who said that friends ought always to be preferred to kings."

These letters were but the forerunners of an amazing correspondence. Later, with fuller experience and fewer illusions, Voltaire could speak of these effusions with cynical frankness. "He likened me to a divine man, and I likened him to Solomon. Epithets cost us nothing. Some of these follies have been printed in my collected works ; but happily they have not printed the thirtieth part of 'em."

It is probable that, in their first letters, neither was wholly insincere. Frederick's enthusiasm seems to have been real enough ; and Voltaire was flattered by the attention, and interested in the character, of this remarkable prince, who was so unlike other princes. As for the fulsome extravagance of these letters, we must remember the age in which they were written—an age of baroque influence ; ornate, florid, curly and allusive in all its forms of speech, dress, politeness, building or writing.

French verses presently made their appearance in Frederick's letters. They were not good verses, but they were ingenious, and more flattering than ever. Our " divine man " corrected their faults with gentleness, and himself wrote verses in reply. No compliment was too rich, no comparison too exalted. Frederick was the Trajan, Maecenas, Marcus Aurelius and Solomon of the North ; he was the Star of the Northern Firmament ; he was both Achilles and Homer. As for Voltaire, he was equal, if not superior, to all the writers of antiquity ; he was not the servant but the master of the Muses.

But these were diversions. More serious writings occupied his time. On the 10th of October, the new play of the *Prodigal Son* was suddenly presented to a surprised audience at the Comédie, who had assembled, as they imagined, to see the *Britannicus* of Racine. This little stratagem, forestalling any cabal, served its purpose. No one knew who had written the new comedy, and so the critics were on their guard, and the audience could enjoy the piece without apprehension. Who was it by ? Probably, said Voltaire, it is by de Gresset. Certainly not by him, Voltaire.

These disavowals, these falsehoods, became habitual. The fear of persecution may justify them. " Falsehood," he said, writing to Thiériot, " is only a vice when it does harm ; 'tis a great virtue when it does good. Be then, more virtuous than ever. We must lie like the devil ; not timidly, not once only, but with boldness and always."

The satire of the *Mondain* was written in 1736, the tragedy of *Merope* was designed, and a work on the *Philosophy of Newton* almost completed. Abbé Moussinot was charged with various commissions in

Paris, and became Voltaire's private agent. Speculations in army contracts were a source of immense profit, and Voltaire found it equally profitable to lend money, on his own terms, to noblemen who were in need of ready cash.

It is impossible, now, to retrace the many activities of this busy and vigorous mind, for ever at work, for ever scheming, battling, full of contrivance, full of ambition, and always ready to seize a new opportunity or to follow a new thought. Nor can we describe in detail all the quarrels, all the flights, evasions, trickeries and turnings of this amazing life.

" A comedy ; after a comedy, some geometry ; after geometry, the teaching of Newton ; and in the midst of all, sickness ; and with sickness, persecutions more cruel than any fever." So he writes to de Cideville in December ; but Cirey was always a paradise and Emilie the angel. Even the " persecutions " and the great quarrels were sometimes forgotten. " The vapours, which Rousseau and Desfontaines try to raise from the midst of the filth in which they rear their heads, do not reach me. Sometimes I spit upon 'em ; but 'tis without thinking on't."

Towards the end of 1736, the publication of the *Mondain*, judged by ruffled authorities " a scandalous work," exposed Voltaire to new dangers of persecutions or even of imprisonment. Another flight : this time to Holland.

He left poor Madame du Châtelet full of anxieties and fears. She employed all her resources, all the influence at her disposal, to soften the austere de Chauvelin, the Keeper of the Seals. Voltaire himself tried to throw dust in the eyes of his pursuers by pretending that he was in England. " I am off to Cambridge," he wrote

to Thiériot, knowing well that his letter would be opened in the post, "to finish my little course of Newtonism." In Holland he was received with much excitement. The clumsy *incognito* of "Revol, a trader," was easily penetrated; at Leyden, men flocked to see him—among them, twenty gentlemen from the court of King George. He tells Mademoiselle Quinault the actress, "divine Thalia," that "Here I am more greatly honoured than I deserve: a magistrate of Amsterdam has translated the *Death of Caesar*. They are going to play it, and he has dedicated it to me. I am not thus honoured in my own country."

At the end of February he came back to Cirey, but without allowing his return to be generally known. On the 30th of March, he writes to Moussinot "from Cambridge," and in May he says, "I am still in England."

Cirey was now provided with a little theatre, and a dark room for the Newtonian experiments. Moussinot was overloaded with commissions; he had to obtain quickly an infinite number of things, minutely specified, and awaited with impatience. He had to send telescopes, walking-sticks, pocket scissors, toilet tweezers ("not the little ones of the Quai de Gesvres, but those which are sold in the Rue Saint-Honoré"), feather brushes for the ornaments, brooms for the floors, diamond buckles for shoes and garters, barometers, thermometers ("the longest are the best"), retorts, crucibles, pans for smelting, marble chimney-pieces, clocks, watches, lenses, mirrors, bedroom slippers, powder, burning-glasses, a fowling-piece, jewels and trinkets for the divine Emilie, and a thousand and one curious and varied objects. With all this, innumerable money transactions, and more than once a work of real charity. "There is a certain Mademoiselle d'Anfreville, a lady

of quality, who has an estate of some kind near Cirey. I scarce know her, but she is in extreme need. She lodges near Saint-Germain-des-Prés. My good Abbé, take a coach and find her ; tell her that I take the liberty of lending her ten pistoles, and that, when she has need of more, I have the honour to be at her service."

In July, a little, vivacious, gouty Courlander, Baron Keyserling — *Caesarion-Keyserling* — arrived at " the earthly paradise of Cirey." He came as the ambassador of Frederick, and he brought with him the valuable and impressive gift of Frederick's own portrait, and a bundle of metaphysical dissertations. " We received him as Adam and Eve received the angel ; except that he had better cheer and a gayer entertainment."

Keyserling, boisterous, talkative, himself confused by his own knowledge of tongues, and speaking none of them well, saw with delight a comedy in the little theatre ; saw fireworks on the lawn, and his master's name traced by coloured lights : FREDERICK THE HOPE OF THE HUMAN RACE.

The Baron took away with him a manuscript copy of *Louis XIV* ; he might have taken the *Pucelle* ; but Madame du Châtelet was too cautious to allow it out of her hands. He took with him, also, a happy and vivid impression of the divine Voltaire and not less divine Emilie, and of all the wonders of the " earthly paradise." The little Courlander, for his part, had fired Voltaire's imagination with an account of his royal master. But the poet was not to be coaxed from his paradise. " My principal misfortune," he wrote to Frederick, " is that my ill health will doubtless prevent me from being a witness of the good that you will do to men, and of the grand example that you will set before them."

Meanwhile, Frederick continued to send long letters, with gross flattery, bad verses, and borrowed thoughts upon science and philosophy. He received a copy of *Merope* with admiration. Yet the natural vigour of his intelligence prevented him from agreeing with all the Voltairean propositions, and made him assert a deism less apologetic and less vague than that of his teacher. "I have received your metaphysical chapter upon Liberty, and I must tell you, with mortification, that I am not entirely of your advice. I base my system upon a Principle which ought not to be willingly surrendered to the Facts prov'd by mere reasoning. . . . I try to know as much of God as I can, to which end the method of analogy is of no little help to me. I see . . . that a Creator should be wise and powerful. . . . Hence it follows, that the Authour of this Universe must have had a purpose in creating it."

What says our philosopher of Cirey? He is ready for all arguments, for all occasions. "One would have thought this letter was from Mr Leibnitz, or from Mr Wolff, to one of his pupils"—but no! it is signed *Federic:* it is one of the prodigies of the royal mind!

So life went on, for a few months, with no disturbance, no aggravation, but full of a thousand activities. In the spring of 1738, Voltaire's niece, Madame Denis, and her husband, paid a visit to Cirey. Voltaire had always a true affection for his niece (a horrid woman) who, when he was an old man, kept house for him.

Madame Denis, in a letter to friend Thiériot, gave an account of this visit. To her, Cirey was desolation, where nothing could be seen but wild mountains, and where the civilisation of Paris was far indeed. Voltaire was living, she said, in a "terrifying solitude," and it seemed impossible for him to "break his chains." He

was far from well ; but Madame du Châtelet had grown plump, and was full of good humour and good health. It had to be allowed that Emilie was " a woman of much spirit, very handsome, and employing every imaginable art to seduce him." She was continually arranging little things to please him, and reading aloud passages from " the best philosophers."

The many enquiries and purchases with which Moussinot had been charged, the many experiments in the dark room, were to bear fruit in an *Essay on the Nature and Propagation of Fire*, with which Voltaire competed for the prize offered by the Academy of Sciences. This attempt, on the part of a mere amateur, was daring enough ; but he had an extraordinary gift for acquiring rapidly the essentials of any subject in which he was interested, and he knew well how to pick the brains of others.

Madame du Châtelet decided to compete also. She did not communicate this design to Voltaire, for fear of hampering or annoying him, but worked in secret. Her friend, Madame de Grafigny, tells us how this astonishing woman composed her treatise at night. She slept but one hour ; then, after plunging her face and hands in cold water, set about her work. In a letter to the savant Maupertuis, Emilie herself gives the story of this enterprise :

" I could not make any experiments, for I was working unknown to M. de Voltaire, and I could not have concealed them from him. I did not think of it until a month before the date on which the essays had to be sent in ; I had to work at night, and these matters were quite new to me. M. de Voltaire's work, which was nearly finished before I began my own, gave me ideas ;

and I was seiz'd by the desire to run the same course. I got to work without knowing whether I would send in my *Memoir*, and I said nothing of it to M. de Voltaire, because I had no wish to blush before him for an enterprise which I feared might displease him—and moreover, I opposed nearly all his ideas in my own treatise. I did not confess it to him until I saw by the *Gazette* that neither he nor I had a share in the prize."

Both failed ; yet both were honourably mentioned and placed high on the list—Madame du Châtelet, indeed, preceded Voltaire, for she was given the sixth place, and he the seventh. Both essays contained ingenious ideas, and advanced new theories, afterwards proved to be correct. Emilie, with a view far beyond that of many learned men of her time, assumed that " rays of different colours do not give off an equal degree of heat." The prize was divided, and the first name on the list was that of Euler : a victory for the hateful Cartesian theory of whirlpools and the flaccid optimism of Leibnitz. Our Newtonians of Cirey were heretics : and who could suppose an academy favourable to heretics ?

But the heretics of Cirey were greatly discouraged. Emilie, aware that her work could not have been pleasing to the judges, had dared to hope for the honour of an *accessit*, though not for a share in the prize ; but how could the judges have failed to reward the learning and the merit of M. de Voltaire ? And M. de Voltaire, with the fine generosity of his wonder and affection, could not understand how it was that Emilie had not received one of the prizes. It was all those damned Cartesian whirlpools. " M. de Maupertuis, the greatest geometrician in Europe, has said bluntly enough that

the two winning French works are pitiful things—but that must not be repeated." He was not concerned with his own work ; but that of Madame du Châtelet, "full of things which would do honour to the most learned men," should at least be printed. He wrote to Maupertuis, asking him to use his influence with the Academy. He wrote also to Réaumur and Dufay. Réaumur, a friendly and gallant man, supported the scheme, and the two papers were accordingly printed in the *Collection* of the Academy.

In July, a Dutch bookseller published, without Voltaire's consent, a part of the *Elements of Newton*, with additions by another hand. This provoked a new satire from Desfontaines, who twitted Voltaire with having, at a ripe age, abandoned poetry for science.

"M. de Voltaire hath incontestably received from nature the talent of poetry ; but is Nature so prodigal of her gifts, and is there not something incompatible between the genius of philosophy and the genius of rhyming ? The first steps which we take in any science usually flatter our self-esteem. We work with ardour, we read with industry, we write for ourselves, and conclude easily that what we have wrote for our own instruction may serve to instruct others ; such, apparently, are the motives which have induc'd M. de Voltaire to write upon *Newtonism*, and then to print what he has written."

That was enough, and more than enough. The answering satire of the *Preservative* (if satire can fitly describe such ugly cudgelling) was quickly written and printed. It was published under the name of the Chevalier de Mouhy, a literary adventurer and purveyor of gossip. At the head of the pamphlet was a cut representing Desfontaines being flogged at the prison

of La Bicêtre, and there followed a letter which the author of the *Preservative* was supposed to have received from the author of the *Henriade* in reply to certain enquiries. In this letter, the whole story of Desfontaines' imprisonment, and of his release at the insistence of Voltaire, was frankly related. All this was known before, and the wretched Abbé had no character to lose ; but the vehemence and brutality of the attack staggered him. He replied, in December, with an equally brutal attack—*Voltairomania*.

It is a little strange that Voltaire should have been so much concerned with so mean an adversary, and that he should have joined his name, in the category of hatred, with that of Jean-Baptiste Rousseau. He professed, indeed, that he was not really disturbed, and that he lashed his enemies on principle. He was but " crushing the Infamous," as he would have said later. We find him writing, on the 19th of January, 1739, to Father d'Olivet :

" You must not suppose that the sweet, industrious life of Cirey, in the midst of the greatest magnificence and the best of cheer, the best of books, and, what is of more value, in the midst of affection, can be troubled for one single moment by the croaking of a wretch, who, together with the husky voice of old Rousseau, makes a concert of insults which are despised by every intelligence and detested by every heart. In punishing the Abbé Desfontaines, I seek but one thing ; to show that I have not had a greater part than you have in the *Preservative*. The authour of this pamphlet has made use of two letters known to you for a long time : the one upon Berkeley, the Bishop of Cloyne . . . and the other upon the affair of Bicêtre. One or two people

have helped the authour to patch up this *Preservative*, which is a mere inventory and not a work. I have the conclusive proof in my own hands, which I would show you, if the Abbé Desfontaines, who owes me his life, and who by way of thanks has outraged me so grossly, was capable of feeling his wrong and correcting himself."

In such evasions, Voltaire himself was using methods "despised by every intelligence and detested by every heart." Here was a great man, stooping to throw stones or fling mud at a creature so base that he had neither friends nor credit. It is a sorry picture.—But what of the life at Cirey, "in the midst of affection"?

Madame de Grafigny has left us a vivid account of the earthly paradise, where she was entertained in December, 1738. After describing the rich and complex appearance of Voltaire's rooms, she goes on to the apartment of Madame du Châtelet:

"Her chamber is panelled and painted in yellow lacquer with pale blue hangings; an alcove of the same, hung with charming *Indian* papers. The bed is in blue moiré; and everything is so disposed that all, even to the dog's basket, is blue and yellow: chairs, desk, brackets and writing-table. . . . There are glasses, pictures by *Paul Veronese*. . . . On one side of the alcove is a little boudoir; one is ready to fall upon one's knees on entering it. The panelling is blue, and the ceiling is painted and lacquered by a pupil of *Martin* who has been kept here for three years. All the little panels are fill'd with pictures by *Watteau*. There are the *Five Senses*, then two of *La Fontaine's* fables, the *Kiss Return'd*, of which I have the two prints,

and the *Geese of Father Philip*. Ah ! what pictures ! the frames are gilded in filigree upon the mouldings. . . . This divine boudoir has a window which opens upon a charming terrace with an admirable prospect. On the other side of the alcove is the divine wardrobe, decorated with marble, hung with gridelin, with the most delicious prints." Everything was "gay," "divine," "enchanted." And then the bathroom—so neat, so small, but so luxurious ! "Admirably carved and gilded . . . a little sopha, charming little chairs . . . brackets, porcelains, pictures . . . the ceiling is painted, the chamber is rich . . . glasses and diverting books on lacquer tables. It would seem all made for the people of Lilliput." Philosophers were never more prettily housed.

The other rooms were far from "divine." Poor Madame de Grafigny was put in a bare, draughty chamber, with cracks in the walls and with rattling windows. She says, indeed, that "all that does not belong to my lady and to Voltaire is unspeakably mean." Du Châtelet himself had no share in the "magnificence" of the paradise.

Between ten and eleven in the morning, coffee was served in Voltaire's "gallery." There was then a general conversation on literature, geometry, plays and what not. After that, Voltaire, making a bow to the company, retired to his rooms for work or experiment, and in ordinary circumstances the household did not assemble again until it was time for supper—occasionally there was a light collation at four o'clock. Supper was at nine. Here there was good cooking and good food, though not in abundance. Madame du Châtelet once wrote with extraordinary frankness to d'Argental on the subject of health and diet :

"There are some things which would surely ruin my health, such as wine, for example, and liquors of all sorts : I have renounced them from my early youth. I have a temperament of fire, and spend the mornings in drowning myself with liquids. In return, I often give way to the gluttony with which God has endowed me ; but I repair these excesses by a rigorous diet which I impose upon myself at the first signs of inconvenience, and which has always sav'd me from illness."

Voltaire was often late for supper. He had to be enticed away from his desk, and the meal was sometimes nearly over before he appeared. His table-talk was usually charming. He was gallant, witty and good-humoured. Behind his chair stood his own lackey, to whom the other servants handed plates, dishes or wine as if they were pages waiting on a king. The shadowy husband, du Châtelet, ate in silence, or fell asleep, presently withdrawing to his own cheerless apartments. It was then that the conversation became lighter and freer. The company would consist of Madame de Champbonin, the two philosophers, and any guests who might happen to be there. After supper, Madame du Châtelet would return to her work, and it was often five or seven in the morning before she went to bed, and then only for two or three hours.

When the two philosophers had need of exercise, Madame would go riding upon the mare Hirondelle, or would jingle away in her pretty calèche ; Voltaire would sling a wonderful game-bag over his shoulder, a bag fitted with all the necessary appliances, take his fowling-piece, and trudge off to the woods. Perhaps du Châtelet may have joined him. Unfortunately, we

have no account of these expeditions ; it would be pleasant indeed to be able to display the author of the *Henriade* as a sportsman ; it would be interesting to know whether he who fought so manfully against the Cartesian whirlwinds had a quick eye and a steady hand with a gun.

Sometimes there were evening entertainments in the little theatre, gay performances, frolics with marionettes, Voltaire capering and laughing like a boy. Or the magic lantern would be installed, and the most comical histories—the story of wicked Desfontaines or the adventures of de Richelieu—cunningly displayed, and made a thousand times more laughable by the invention of our naughty philosopher. Or Madame du Châtelet would sing "whole operas." But these diversions were reserved for the rare occasions when visitors were present, and when Emilie and Voltaire were disposed to amuse themselves and their company.

Little tiffs, of course, were not unknown. Emilie was quick ; she had a temper. She would request him brusquely to change his coat if it was not to her liking. Voltaire would storm or sulk ; he would swiftly and gloomily retire to his room and plead the colic ; or they would both rail at each other in forcible, fluent English.

Madame de Grafigny tells her own story of the horrible scene, in which she was accused, apparently without reason, of having circulated some copies of the *Pucelle*. First she had to endure the hysterical rage of Voltaire, crying, cursing and weeping ; and then the more terrible anger of the marquise—more terrible because it was more controlled, more cruelly directed and more insulting. If Madame de Grafigny spoke the truth, all this was due to the misreading of a

private letter, treacherously intercepted by her hostess. Whatever may have been the rights and wrongs of the case, the poor soul was in a most deplorable situation.

The scene began late at night ; it was continued, with alternations of violence and ferocity, until the early hours of the morning, though Voltaire seems at last to have done what he could to appease the furious Emilie. Madame de Grafigny had no money and no friends ; she could not even afford a room in the nearest village. At midday, Voltaire, whose mood and manners had then completely changed, expressed his pity and regret. Madame du Châtelet, less ready to become agreeable or to admit her own mistake, was drily polite.

At length, mere politeness gave way to humanity, and both Emilie and the repentant Voltaire were gentle and attentive. He, indeed, " made the most humble and the most pathetick excuses." He wept, seeing his poor guest ill and suffering, and repeated again and again that he was truly a wretch for having made her so unhappy.

Such is the story of Madame de Grafigny, a woman who certainly had her misfortunes, but who was indiscreet, garrulous and imaginative, and by no means without facility as a writer. It seems probable that, in her lively account of the scene with *Atys* and *Megira*, she was less concerned with mere exactness than she was with the effect of her narrative.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING AND THE POET

THIÉRIOT was one of those weak meddling men who are perpetually anxious to prove their own importance. He was busy, officious, talkative and indiscreet. It was not long before he found himself most unhappily involved in the quarrel of Voltaire and Desfontaines.

In spite of his assurance to d'Olivet, both Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet were profoundly angered by the publication of the *Voltairomania*. They had some reason to be. Voltaire, in the *Preservative*, had cited Thiériot as a witness of Desfontaines' perfidy in writing a satire against his benefactor while he was yet in the prison of the Bicêtre. Thiériot, he said, had indignantly compelled the Abbé to throw the infamous work in the fire, and this took place at de Bernières' house at Rouen. Desfontaines, or "the young advocate," as he called himself, now printed the following denial :

"M. Thiériot is a man as highly esteemed by honest men as Voltaire is detested by them. He drags about, as tho' despite himself, the shameful relicks of an ancient bond, which he has not yet had the force to break intirely. Well, M. Thiériot, who is here call'd upon as a witness, has been asked whether the facts were true ; and M. Thiériot has been obliged to say that he has no recollection of them. Here, then, we challenge Voltaire. The visit to the country, at the house of M. le Président de Bernières, took place in the holidays of 1725. If there is in existence a libel against Voltaire,

printed in this year, let it be produced. If he replies, that the Abbé Desfontaines himself threw it into the fire, let him cite witnesses. For assuredly he ought not to be believed upon his word. *M. Thiériot*, says he, *obliged him to throw it into the fire*. And here is M. Thiériot, who declares the falsity of the statement. Mister Voltaire is therefore the hardiest and the most desperate of liars."

Madame du Châtelet had tried to conceal this wretched pamphlet from her friend, well knowing to what a pitch of dangerous fury it would rouse him. She had sought the advice of d'Argental, and herself wrote a clever and stinging reply to the libel. And now it appeared that Voltaire, on his side, with equal restraint and consideration, had been concealing the pamphlet from Emilie. Such restraint, on the part of a man so impetuous and so violently disturbed by any personal attack, was truly evidence of deep affection.

But what could be said for Thiériot ? What, indeed, except that fools are treacherous by nature. Thiériot had been flattered, frightened or cajoled by the Abbé. Thiériot was a gossip, a meddler, a man whose miserable self-importance blinded him to the disastrous effect of his own foolish words. His appearance in this ugly quarrel would, at least, bring him before the public ; to be thus patted on the back by a depraved and mischievous rogue like Desfontaines was, on these terms, no indignity. What he actually said, we do not know. Probably he never " declared the falsity of the statement." He may have admitted that his recollection was not clear. That was enough. He was in one of those proverbial corners from which it was impossible to escape with honour. Voltaire, with real generosity,

refused to believe in the treachery of his friend ; Madame du Châtelet, who may have been a little jealous of Thiériot, was in a blaze of anger.

We have an extraordinary letter, written by Thiériot to Madame du Châtelet in reply to her furious demand for an explanation. He is bland, evasive and pompous :

" I recognise in the letter with which you have honour'd me your zeal for your friends, and tho' I am thus extremely edified, I had no need of this emulation to engage myself, as I ought to, on the side of M. de Voltaire in the matter of this unworthy libel. . . . When the *Preservative* appeared, I was mightily scandalized by it, and my friendship was moved and alarmed in the most lively fashion by seeing this libel attributed to M. de Voltaire, of which I believe him altogether incapable. . . . The authour of this pamphlet had inserted therein the fragment of a letter from M. de Voltaire to M. the Marquis Maffei, in which I was mentioned as a witness of what took place at Rivière-Bourdet . . . in 1724 or 1725. I have been much questioned upon the truth of the statement, and this was my reply: *That I remembered the meer fact, but as for the circumstances, they were so indistinct in my mind that I could not give any account of them.* . . . The authour of the *Letter of an Advocate* . . . has taken advantage of a general and very sincere reply. . . . All the information that I can give you, Madam, is that there was some question at Rivière-Bourdet, about this time, concerning a pamphlet against M. de Voltaire. . . . The Abbé Desfontaines showed it to me, and I engaged him to suppress it. As to the date and title of this pamphlet (circumstances of the highest importance) I protest in honour that I remember nothing of

them. . . . My sentiments will be ever the same. Constancy is in my character, as probity, independence, the love of the arts, are in my philosophy. These are my titles to the esteem with which I am regarded by all honest men, and I am more flatter'd by meriting it than by the pretended praises of the authour of this infamous libel ; a libel which deserves the most severe punishment, and at which I am the more indignant since I detest, in general, all such libels . . . as hurtful to the consideration of letters as wholesome criticism is useful to their progress.—I am, in wishing you a happy New Year, etc."

This letter could hardly deceive a woman of Emilie's fine discernment. Her own angry hand wrote quickly upon the margin a series of damning observations.

Thiériot had been pleased enough with the *Preservative* when it first appeared. He dared not mention Desfontaines openly as the author of the *Letter*. The Abbé " showed him the libel"—he could not say who had written it. The question of date was not of the highest importance : the fact itself was of the highest importance. Finally she noted, that all the circumstances which Thiériot had so conveniently forgotten were exactly recorded in his own letters, " which shall be printed, in case he forgets them again."

Thiériot lacked the courage or the decency to write to Voltaire himself. Yet Voltaire begged him to write, in the name of their old friendship :

" Why have you wrote such a dry, ill-timed letter to Madame du Châtelet ? . . . You know the height and firmness of her character ; she looks on friendship as a bond so holy that the least diplomatick shade in friend-

ship appears to her a crime. . . . Once more, tell me that you cannot balance for one moment between Desfontaines and your friend ; make truth glorious. . . . Tell me frankly if you have sent the libel to the Prince Royal [Frederick]. That is of great importance."

But Thiériot, cowed and desperate, kept silence.

" This wretch Desfontaines," cried Voltaire, " hath now obtained what he desired ! He has stolen your friendship from me. 'Tis the one thing I reproach him with." And again : " I snatch a moment from the pangs of a nephritick complaint which is still tormenting me, to tell you that my chief sorrow is to have no news of you. Several of my friends are approaching the Chancellor. Every one helps me, save you : I don't even know whether you have or have not sent this infamous libel, directed rather against you than against me, to the Prince Royal. I calm as best I can the unspeakable resentment of Madame du Châtelet ; M. de Maupertuis is on my side, but we gain nothing ; I beg of you to repair your fault."

Then a bitter complaint to the Count d'Argental : " How is it that the Chevalier de Mouhy, who does not know me, busies himself as tho' he were my brother, and Thiériot, who owes me all, keeps his arms folded in cowardly ingratitude ? . . . He has now the insolence, the baseness, to write and to publish a letter to Madame du Châtelet in which he disavows his former letters ; he has sent it to the Prince Royal ; and to justify himself, says coolly that the *Philosophick Letters* brought him but fifty guineas, and that he did but eat up eighty of my subscriptions [to the *Henriade*]. Is there a soul so dirty and so despicable ? " Such a question might

well be asked. The letter to Madame du Châtelet was not actually published, but it was shown " to more than two hundred persons " ; it was exhibited, in the words of the poor fool himself, " to gentlemen of the Court."

But Voltaire, after writing to d'Argental, received at last a letter from Thiériot. It must have been another evasive and compromising document, but Voltaire was glad enough to hear from the " dirty soul," and to patch up the old friendship. He replied with dignity and fairness, more concerned for the peace of Madame du Châtelet than for his own, yet his letter was clearly that of a friend, anxious to forgive and to be assured of Thiériot's loyalty and affection.

Meanwhile, the marquise had written to Frederick. His Royal Highness must understand that Thiériot was a mere nobody, only known through the kindness of M. de Voltaire ; one who had never entered a gentleman's house except to carry M. de Voltaire's papers or to repeat his sayings. And Frederick showed that he knew his man. Yes ! Thiériot was a pompous fool ; he had a weak head, but a heart not entirely bad. " He never has a cold, but he must tell me about it in four pages of nonsense. . . . Apart from his faults, he is a good fellow." The truth was, that Frederick, playing upon Thiériot's love of importance, had engaged him to send all that was written or said about Voltaire.

Desfontaines was now pursued with that grim, untiring determination which always characterised Voltaire's pursuit of his enemies. Even Mademoiselle Quinault, " divine Thalia " of the Comédie, was called on to assist. It was no longer a question of pamphleteering ; it was a question of grinding the wretch between the great millstones of the law. But this miserable

affair did not employ the whole of his energy, as he assures Mademoiselle Quinault in a letter written at Cirey on the 26th of March :

" I am deeply touch'd by your kindness, Mademoiselle. But come now ! you must understand me. You think that the poison which my enemies are pouring over me by the hogshead is a cold poison which congeals my feeble spirit : no ; it fires it, and their fury gives me animation. *Zulime* was written in the midst of the actions they have forc'd upon me, and in spight of an hundred letters to be wrote every week. My grief at being set upon by those who should have defended me has been turned to tragick sentiments, and the advice of M. d'Argental, joined to your own, has given me the idea of writing a moving tragedy by way of revenge. The secret has not been divulg'd, and I wait always for your instructions. You fear, Mademoiselle, that my mind will not be sufficiently free for the correction of *Zulime* ! You must know that I have been so impatient at not receiving your critickal remarks, that I have begun another tragedy in the interval ; four acts of it are sketch'd already. You will be terribly surprised by the subject ; in a word, I carry your chains ; take delight in your victory and crush me if you will ; but know that you have won the day from the *Bernouillis*, the *Maupertuis*, and the greatest geometricians of Europe, who have just left Cirey. I made verses under their very noses, and I slipp'd on the buskin despite Abbé Nollet's machines, which fill my gallery. Learn something concerning the life of your slave : I am either suffering or working ; and when I am so afflicted by my maladies that I cannot read, I have the resource of rhyming. My moments

are all devoted to work. Is it just that such a life should be so cruelly persecuted? You talk to me of the scribblers who write against my works. I have always ignored the hissing of these little concealed serpents, hidden below the ground. But I complain of the monsters who would attack my life, and of the magistrates who allow these horrors to go unpunished. I have never replied to a critick. But, truly, I have enough self-respect to feel that I deserve to be treated rather differently by my own countrymen. I assure you, Mademoiselle, that you console me indeed for these many annoyances; were I given the choice of losing at once my enemies or your indulgence, I would not accept the bargain."

Voltaire had influence; Desfontaines had little or none; but Voltaire himself was a pestilent fellow in the eyes of Commissioner Hérault, by whom the case was eventually tried. Hérault, anxious to bring this tedious and trivial matter to an end, forced Desfontaines to sign a retraction. Accordingly, on the 4th of April, the Abbé set his hand to this peculiar statement:

"I declare that I am in no way the author of a printed libel entitled *Voltairomania*, and that I disavow it entirely, regarding as calumnious all the actions imputed to M. de Voltaire in this libel; and that I should have thought myself dishonoured had I had the least part in these writings, feeling, as I do, all the sentiments of esteem which are due to his talents, and which the publick so justly accords him."

This declaration, false in every word, had the effect of silencing Desfontaines, though it was not wholly acceptable to Voltaire. But Hérault would go no further; and Hérault, as Madame du Châtelet astutely

perceived, had to be carefully managed. The declaration was not to be made public ; but the Chevalier de Mouhy had a copy of it sent to the *Amsterdam Gazette*, and in that journal it duly appeared.

On the 2nd of May, doubtless under indirect pressure from Hérault, Voltaire wrote and signed a declaration of his own :

" I have always disavowed the *Preservative*, and I have had no part in the collection of pieces which are in this little pamphlet, among which there are some never intended to be made publick."

We may well be appalled by the cold falsehood of these declarations (which deceived no one), by the policy which dictated them, and by the legal and social code to which they were acceptable. Even lawyers and writers, we think, might have lied more becomingly, and with a less impudent violation of the plain truth. But we have to ask whether our indignation is not based upon purely conventional notions of procedure. Matters which plain sense and common honesty can settle between them are not usually brought before a commissioner of police, and the mean quarrel of Voltaire and Desfontaines was one in which sense, honesty and truth had no part to play. A few lies more or less really made no difference. And these formal disclaimers had obvious advantages as forms of compromise. Formal apologies, extracted by legal pressure in settlement of disputes, are in any case morally condemnable and substantially false. Profoundly unedifying as it is, the affair of the *Voltairomania* and the *Preservative* is neither more shocking nor more to be condemned than many of the literary squabbles of more recent times.

Having thus disposed of the Abbé Desfontaines, Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet were free to under-

take another and more difficult enterprise. The du Châtelets were poor, but they had much to gain if they could win one of those dreary family lawsuits in which great revenues are dexterously and doubtfully suspended by the law between two obstinate claimants.

Now came a windfall. A sad little infirm personage, Mark Antony du Châtelet, a cousin of the marquis, came, or was invited, to Cirey. Mark Antony was too gouty to walk and too ill to talk; he was, in fact, inconspicuously dying ; but he made over to Madame du Châtelet his rights in a small principality between Trêves and Juliers. This principality lay within the boundaries of the Prussian states. Voltaire had already (in August, 1738) offered it to Frederick. The offer had no particular attraction for that shrewd young man, and he had declined it. But the rights to the estate of Mark Antony, now vested in the marquise, might be turned to good account and might help matters generally. Voltaire and the marquise therefore set out for Brussels on this new business.

They left Cirey on the 8th of May, and after being entertained by de Seychelles at Valenciennes, reached Brussels by the end of the month. They visited a small property of du Châtelet's at some distance from the town, but returned soon afterwards and installed themselves in the Rue de la Grosse-Tour. Here they were occupied with the intricacies of the dreary lawsuit, and the not less intricate problems of metaphysics and geometry. The marquise took lessons from the mathematician Koenig, at that time the friend of Maupertuis, and wrote pathetically to that great savant of her own limitations and of the alarming superiority of Koenig's understanding.

In spite of these grave pursuits, there was time for social gaiety, and even for gaiety of a pretentious kind.

Was not that "vile Rufus," Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, the lion of Brussels? Voltaire was not the man to abstain from a gesture of defiance. All the fashionable folk of Brussels, Duke of Aremberg and Princess de Chimay among them, were entertained by fiddlers and fireworks at the Rue de la Grosse-Tour.

The entertainment, pleasing enough for the guests, had been spoilt and saddened for Voltaire by a grim disaster. While he was busily supervising the decorations, two carpenters fell from a scaffold on the third floor and were crushed at his feet. The effect of this horrible sight, so unnerving for a man of quick sensibilities, lingered in his mind for days.

Not long after the fête, Emilie and Voltaire were the guests of the Duke of Aremberg at Engheim. Here Voltaire wrote a charming letter to Helvetius, that sprightly youth who was later to shock every one by his essay on the *Human Spirit*:

"I perceive, my dear fellow, that the verses I wrote you were so bad that *Apollo* had no mind you should receive 'em. My letter was addressed to Charleville, where you should have been, and I took care to add a little note so that the letter might reach you in whatever corner of your province you happen'd to be. You have lost nothing; but I, for my part, have lost the idea that you had of my exactness. Indeed, my friendship is not negligent. I love you too well to be lazy where you are concerned. I await your work, my pretty *Apollo*, with a liveliness equal to your own. I was hoping to send you from Brussels my new *Dutch* edition, but I have not yet received a single copy from my booksellers. There is not one to be had in Brussels, yet I learn they are to be had in Paris. The Dutch printers,

who are bungling pirates, have doubtless made many mistakes in their edition and are afraid that I may see it in time to complain of it and cry it down. I can only find out about this in fifteen days. I am actually, accompanied by Madame du Châtelet, at Engheim with the Duke of Aremberg, at seven leagues from Brussels. I play much at *brelan* ; but our precious studies do not lose thereby. We ought to make an alliance between work and pleasure ; that is your own practice, and 'tis a little mixture that I advise you to make all your life—for in truth you are born both for the one and the other.

" I confess, to my shame, that I have never read the *Utopia* of Thomas Morus ; despite which, I took on myself to give a fête in Brussels a few days ago under the name of the Ambassadour of *Utopia*. The fête was for Madame du Châtelet, of course ; but will you believe it ?—there was no one in the town who knew what was meant by *Utopia*. This is not the land of the *belles-lettres*. Dutch books are prohibited, and I cannot conceive how it was that Rousseau came to choose such an asylum. This Patriarch of Slanderers, who has long ago lost the art of slandering, and has preserv'd only its rage, is quite as unknown here as the *belles-lettres*. I am actually in a castle where there have never been any books except those brought by Madame du Châtelet and myself ; but, by way of compensation, there are gardens more beautiful than those of Chantilly, and here one may lead that sweet and free life which is the joy of the country. The owner of this beautiful estate is worth more than many books ; I believe we are going to play a comedy here ; at least we are reading the parts for the actors.

" I have a very different idea in my head : I have finished this *Mahomet*, of which I shew'd you the sketch.

I am desirous of knowing how a play of a kind so new and so daring will succeed with our gallant *Frenchmen*; I would have the piece acted without disclosing the authour. In whom should I confide sooner than in you? Do you not command this friend in Paris, who owes you all, and has such a liking for verses? Could you not send it to him? Could he not read it to the players? But does he read well?—for a good enunciation and a pathetick diction make the proper frame for the picture. So, my dear friend, give me your thoughts upon all this."

From Engheim, Voltaire and the marquise returned to Brussels. The marquise, tired perhaps of lawsuits and mathematics, felt the need of diversion. Nothing would please her but a visit to Paris. Voltaire, who, as we have just seen, was anxious to get *Mahomet* in the hands of the players, was probably willing enough to go there.

They set out, with the indispensable Koenig, towards the end of August, travelling quietly and by short stages. "We are treated like village physicians, who are fetch'd in people's coaches, but allowed to return on foot."

Voltaire wrote to Madame de Champbonin from Cambrai: "If you ask me why we are going to Paris, I can only answer for myself. I am going there because I follow Emilie. But why is Emilie going? I don't exactly know. She pretends 'tis all necessary, and I am fated to believe her as I am to follow her."

He was not wrong in believing *Mahomet* to be one of his best tragedies, yet he was always attentive to criticism. Frederick, whose own exercises in French verse were more pretentious and more laboured than

ever, saw fit to raise one or two little points. It was not correct, he said, to talk of " crushing sparks " ; you might snuff or extinguish them, but you could not crush them. This profound observation had its due effect, and the lines were altered. Mademoiselle Quinault, whose criticism was of real value, and reflected the true opinion of the Comédie, objected to the horrors of the piece. To her the author replied with playful petulance :

" Adorable Thalia, I have a good substantial dish to offer you, and you ask me for whipp'd cream ! I have now re-read *Mahomet*, I have re-read *Zulime* ; this *Zulime* is truly a poor thing, and t'other is perhaps the least bad of my works. I hope the honesty with which I condemn my *African* will allow some credit to the modest opinion which I dare have of my *Prophet*. . . Decide ; I commit myself to you ; you alone shall have the manuscript. Don't on any account leave it for so much as a quarter of an hour in the hands of Minet ; he won't fail to have copies made of it and to send 'em to the country players. Know, fair Thalia, that in sending you my *Prophet*, I'll correct him prodigiously ; but I'll correct him even more when I have learn'd your opinion. You know that you are my oracle."

Zulime, played in June, was not well received ; it was revised, and played with more success, twenty-two years later.

Meanwhile, Voltaire had plunged again into the tumultuous life of Paris, realising the inconvenience, as well as the delights, of notoriety. He wrote a description of his activities to the comfortable Madame de Champbonin :

" My dear friend, Paris is a gulf wherein are lost that peace and composure of the soul without which our life is but a fretting tumult ! I do not live indeed ; I am carried away, drawn from myself in these whirlwinds. I come, I go ; I sup at one end of the town, to sup the next day at the other. From a meeting of three or four intimate friends, one must needs fly to the Opera, to the Comedy, to gape at curiosities like a stranger, to embrace an hundred people in one day, to make and receive an hundred protestations ; not one moment to one's self, and no time for writing, thinking, or sleeping. I am like that hero of antiquity who died beneath the flowers which people flung at him."

All this coming and going, all this excitement, the late hours and the early visitors, were too much for him. On the 1st of October he was ill, feverish. The doctors Silva and Morand were quickly in attendance, bleeding and bathing the frail body, and talking gloomily about kidneys and intestines—luckily, said Voltaire, without offending those miserable organs. But these disorders (hardly comprehensible to the doctors, for all their solemn talk and nodding heads) never lasted for long. They were of the kind we should now call temperamental—without knowing much more than Silva and Morand—, and were due to the excessive stimulation of the mind and the excessive fatigue of the body. Purging, bleeding and bathing were good enough cures, and a few days in bed the best cure of all.

After a short stay at Cirey, cold and dreary in the November days, Voltaire and Emilie returned to the Rue de la Grosse-Tour in Brussels.

At Brussels and at the Hague, the two friends were unceasingly active. There was the dreary du Châtelet

lawsuit. There was a piece of cloudy finesse with Van Duren the bookseller, concerning Frederick's *Anti-Machiavelli*. There was a squabble with Piron. And always work. Always Maupertuis moving sagely in the background and throwing a little shifting light on the tangled mysteries of natural science and a most unnatural philosophy. Always plays and histories, nervous corrections and painful revisions ; and always the copious, jingling and flattering letters of Frederick, with their horrible verses and hollow sentiments.

In the midst of it all, Voltaire had time to write a gay letter in English to Falkener, still the ambassador at the Porte. With it he sent a set of his published works, probably the Amsterdam edition. Here is the truly delightful letter :

" Dear Sir, I take the liberty to send you my old follies, having no new things to present you with. I am now at Brussels with Madame du Châtelet, who hindered me, some years ago, from paying you a visit at Constantinople, and whom I shall live with in all probability the greatest part of my life, since for these ten years I have not departed from her. She is now at the trouble of a damn'd suit at law, that she persues at Brussels. We have abandoned the most agreeable retirement in the country, to bawl here in the grotto of the flemish *chicane*.

" The high Dutch baron who takes upon himself to present you with this packet of french reveries, is one of the noble *players* whom the emperor sends into Turkey to represent the majesty of the Roman empire before the Highness of the Musulman power.

" I am persuaded you are become, now a days, a perfect Turk ; you speak no doubt their language very

well, and you keep, to be sure, a pretty *harem*. Yet I am afraid you want two provisions or ingredients which I think necessary *to make that nauseous draught of life go down*, I mean books and friends. Should you be happy enough to have met at Pera with men whose conversation agrees with your way of thinking ? If so, you want for nothing ; for you enjoy health, honours and fortune. Health and places I have not ; I regret the former, I am satisfied without the other. As to fortune, I enjoy a very competent one, and I have a friend besides. Thus I reckon myself happy, though I am sickly as you saw me at Wandsworth.

" I hope I shall return to Paris with Madame du Châtelet in two years time. If, about that season, you return to dear England by the way of Paris, I hope I shall have the pleasure to see your dear Excellency at her house, which is without doubt one of the finest in Paris, and situated in a position worthy of Constantinople ; for it looks upon the river ; a long tract of land interspers'd with pretty houses, is to be seen from every window. Upon my word, I would, with all that, prefer the *vista* of the sea of Marmara before that of the Seine, and I would pass some months with you at Constantinople, if I could live without that lady, whom I look upon as a great man, and as a most solid and respectable friend. She understands Newton ; she despises superstition, and in short, she makes me happy.

" Farewell, my dear friend. . . . Yours for ever ! "

Voltaire's peculiar vagueness or indifference in regard to time will be noticed in his allusion to Madame du Châtelet. He had not, as he says, lived with her for ten years, but for rather less than seven. It was actually eleven years since he had seen Falkener, and

this letter proves the worth and quality of his friendship for this plain, sensible and generous Englishman.

On the 6th of June, 1740, Frederick wrote to him from Charlottenberg, announcing his father's death, and his own accession to the throne of Prussia. The letter is a remarkable one :

" My dear friend, my lot has changed, and I have assisted at the last moments of a king, at his agony, his death. In coming to the royal estate, I had assuredly no need of this lesson in order to be sickened by the vanity of human greatness.

" I was contemplating a little work on metaphysicks ; it has become a work of politicks instead. I had thought to joust with the amiable Voltaire, and now I have to fence with Machiavelli. So, my dear Voltaire, we are not masters of our fate. The whirlwind of circumstance bears us away, and we must submit to be borne away. I pray you to see, in me, only a zealous citizen, a rather doubting philosopher, but a truly faithful friend. For God's sake, write to me as a man, and with me despise all names and titles and all outward show. . . . Farewell, my dear Voltaire ; if I live, I'll see you, and this very year. Love me always, and be ever sincere with your friend."

Frederick was now twenty-eight. He spoke the truth in saying that he despised grandeur ; but he despised it, not so much by virtue of a philosophic attitude as by virtue of those harsh, inhumane or perverted qualities which made him at once so interesting and so formidable. There is something dreadful in the dry composure of this young man, turning so coolly to his duel with " Machiavelli "—

the "old mitred Machiavelli," Cardinal de Fleury, the French minister. He had little cause to love his father, but there is something dreadful, too, in this calm, supercilious view of a death-bed : merely a lesson in human vanity, and rather disgusting.

Young Frederick, however, had the essential qualities of a great statesman ; he was never hampered by scruples or unnerved by remorse or made unsteady by sentiment. He had been well hardened. He went for his mark with the deadly insensibility of a well-aimed bullet, but not with a bullet's calculable directness. He knew how to make up his mind and how to get what he wanted. And he wanted Voltaire, and had made up his mind to get him.

Frederick wanted other distinguished men, too. He wanted Maupertuis—who, with all his oddities, had courage, and with all his inordinate vanity had real learning. Here, indeed, was the beginning of the grim Prussian ideal of "culture." Potsdam (and why not ?) was to be the intellectual centre of Europe. Great men, hired or bribed, would establish a great academy at Berlin. Frederick would have big battalions, but—yes, by God !—he would have big libraries as well.

It must be admitted that France offered little reward to men who practised art, science or literature. Upon her throne sat Louis XV, weakest and most unworthy of her kings. She was governed by feeble or corrupt men or their mistresses, and oppressed by the most irksome and debased kind of religious tyranny. Frederick had a good chance. It was not long before Maupertuis took the bait—Wolff, Euler and Algarotti (the author of *Newtonism for Ladies*) had been more easily decoyed.

In view of what subsequently occurred, it is extremely

important and interesting to see in what strain Voltaire was at this time (June to September, 1740) writing to Maupertuis. Under the date of the 22nd of June we have the following letter, written from Brussels :

" Great men are my kings, Sir, but the reverse does not hold good—kings are not my great men. 'Tis very well for a head to be crown'd, but I prize only those which can think like yours, and 'tis your esteem and friendship, not the favour of sovereigns, which I would fain possess. I would place the king of Prussia alone upon a level with you, because he is of all kings the least of a king and the most of a man. He is enlightened and benevolent, full of great talents and of great virtues ; it will astonish and afflict me sensibly if he is ever false to himself. It does but remain for him to acquire geometry ; but he is a profound metaphysician, and less of a babbler than the great Volffius.

" I shall go to observe this Star of the North, if I can quit the one whose satellite I have been for ten years. I am not like the comets of Descartes which pass from vortex to vortex.

" Talking of the vortex, I have had the fourth volume of Joseph Privat de Molières, which proves the existence of God by means of a five-pound weight placed upon a mouse-trap. It seems that your colleagues, the examiners of his book, have not signified their acceptance of this strange proof ; upon which I have taken the liberty of saying :

Now when it comes to proving God,
The folk of your Academy
Give up the game without a word,
And prove their true sagacity.

. . . . . .

" Farewell, Sir ; I am devoted to you for ever. You know that I have always loved you, although I have admired you : sentiments which are rarely compatible."

He wrote again on the 1st of July :

" The King of Prussia tells me, Sir, that he has *acquired* you, and also Messieurs Wolff and Euler. Does that mean that you will go to Berlin, or that you will direct from Paris the academic labours of the Society which the most amiable of kings, the one most worthy of a throne and of you, desires to establish ? I pray you tell me what your ideas are, and to believe that you cannot communicate them to a man who is more your admirer and more your friend."

Again, on the 21st of July :

" So here you are, Sir, like the *Messiah* : three kings running after you. But I see well that, since you have 7,000 livres from France, and are a Frenchman, you will not abandon *Paris* for *Berlin*. Had you reason to complain of your country, you would do mighty well to accept another, and, in that case, I'd congratulate my adorable King of Prussia ; but 'tis for you to realise your own position. . . . You see me for a few days at the Hague ; I shall return presently to Brussels ; will you permit me to speak to you here of another matter which hath lain upon my heart this long while ? I am distress'd to behold you at variance with a lady who, after all, is the only one who can understand you, and whose manner of thinking deserves your friendship. You are made to love each other ; write to her (a man is always in the right when he puts himself in the wrong

with a lady) ; you will re-discover her friendship, since you have always had her esteem."

The policy of these charming letters is quite clear. What was said about Frederick was palpably intended for the eyes, or ears, of that monarch ; and if Maupertuis removed to Berlin (as he did very soon) it was advisable to keep on the right side of him. There may have been something more than policy. It is doubtful whether Voltaire ever had a profound affection for Maupertuis, but he certainly did appreciate his learning and his conversation. He thought of him, rightly, as one of the best informed men of his age, and one of the men best worth knowing. Maupertuis had not yet uttered those crazy notions which exposed him so fatally, some thirteen years later, to the awful broadsides of *Dr Akakia and the Native of Saint-Malo*. The coldness towards Madame du Châtelet was probably due to her book on the *Institutions of Physicks*, in which she had shown a preference for the system of Leibnitz. The book was not published until the end of the year, but Maupertuis had doubtless seen the manuscript.

In the meantime, Frederick became more insistent. He did not want to see Madame du Châtelet. Frederick had no fondness for ladies unless they were of a manly build, or slim like his drummer-boys. He could not, so he said, endure the combined brilliance of Apollo and the divine Emilie—no ordinary mortal, indeed, could endure such a blaze of genius.

The marquise offered him the house in the Rue de la Grosse-Tour. The very idea of a meeting in Brussels was too much for the exalted sensibilities of the poet and the king. Voltaire protested that he would faint for sheer joy, he would swoon away at the very sight of

his Northern Star : Frederick, not to be outdone, vowed that he would die of delight.

At last, the king arranged to meet Voltaire and the marquise *incognito* at Anvers, but the quartan fever intervened, and Voltaire had to set out alone, some days later, to meet the Star of the North at Clèves.

Voltaire and Frederick met for the first time on the 11th of September, 1740, at the bare and desolate castle of Moyland or Meuse.

After such preludes, the meeting might have been a little awkward, there might have been a shade of embarrassment when Apollo and Solomon beheld each other face to face. The situation was made easier by Frederick's illness, and by the extreme simplicity, or downright discomfort, of his quarters. Voltaire found the king in a plain, cheerless room. He was lying on a small camp bed, and was shivering and sweating with his quartan fever. He wore a dressing-gown of coarse blue cloth and was covered by a tattered quilt. His retinue consisted only of a few troopers and orderlies, and he was attended by the sage Maupertuis, by the ladies' Newtonian, Algarotti, and by the gouty and garrulous Keyserling. There was also the privy councillor, Rambonet, who wore a strange magisterial perruque—one tail of it hardly falling below his shoulder, and the other stuck into his pocket.

In the evening, when the access of the fever had passed, the king rose and came down to supper.

When, some twenty years later, Voltaire wrote his brief *Memoirs* concerning Frederick, he affected to make light of this interview. He had learnt that kings were dangerous playfellows, and had found the new Marcus Aurelius capable of perfidies which ill became his borrowed character. He says nothing of how he read

Mahomet to his royal friend, of Frederick's delight, and the applause of that curious little group of soldiers and philosophers. He does, indeed, allow that he felt drawn towards the king, who showed both grace and spirit, and who, after all, had the attractions of royalty. In actual fact, it is clear that both men were deeply and sincerely impressed with each other. Writing to de Cideville shortly afterwards, Voltaire thus described the meeting at Clèves :

" 'Twas there [at Clèves] that I saw one of the most loveable men in the world, a man who would be the delight of society, who would be sought everywhere, if he was not a king ; philosopher without severity, full of sweetness, charm and complaisance, forgetting that he is a king when he finds himself with his friends, and forgetting it so perfectly that he had almost made me forget it also, and I had need to jog my memory to remember that I beheld, seated upon the foot of my bed, a sovereign who had an army of an hundred thousand men. This was indeed the moment for reading your amiable verses to him ; Madame du Châtelet, who ought to have sent them to me, has not done so. I was mightily vexed."

He wrote to Maupertuis, almost immediately after his return to the Hague ; and the letter, though obviously politic, has a touch of enthusiasm which is not altogether unreal :

" When we parted from each other at Clèves, and you went to the right and I to the left, I thought myself at the Last Judgment, where God separates the elect from the damn'd. To you said *Divus Federicus :* Be seated

at my right hand in the paradise of Berlin ; and to me : Go, accursed one, to Holland.

" So here am I in this phlegmatick *hell*, far from that divine fire which animates Frederick, Maupertuis, Algarotti. For the love of God, bestow on me the charity of a few sparks in the stinking waters where I am founder'd ! Tell me, at least, of your pleasures, your designs. . . ."

He wrote also, with unquestionable sincerity, to his friend the President Hénault :

" If the king of Prussia had come to Paris, Sir, he would not have belied the charms you have discovered in his letters. He speaks as he writes. . . . 'Tis a miracle of nature that the son of a crowned ogre, reared with brutes, should have found, in his wilderness, all that delicacy and all those easy graces, which in Paris are only possess'd by a few, and yet have made the reputation of Paris. I think I have already said that his ruling passions are those of being just and pleasing. He is made for society as he is for the throne. . . . You have reason to be surpris'd with his letters ; you would be even more so with the *Anti-Machiavelli*. . . . As I despise and detest the base and infamous Superstition, which dishonours so many States, so I worship true Virtue, and I think to have found it, both in this Prince and in his Book."

Frederick, for his part, had been fairly transported. " I have seen this Voltaire," he wrote. " He has the eloquence of Cicero, the sweetness of Pliny and the wisdom of Agrippa ; in one word, he reunites the virtues and the talents of three of the greatest men of antiquity. His mind works without ceasing ; each

drop of ink is a shaft of wit leaping from his pen. . . . Du Châtelet is indeed happy in possessing him."

But poor Madame du Châtelet was not so sure of possessing him. She was uneasy. The dreary lawsuit, as well as the interests of Voltaire himself, required her presence in Paris, and when Voltaire was at the Hague, seeing to the printing of the *Anti-Machiavelli*, she had already left Brussels. Now, she thought, Frederick, of whose design to *acquire* the poet there could be no doubt at all, had a more open field. Every woman knows how much her influence depends upon mere proximity. What is more, the affairs of Europe were changing in a way that might prove disastrous to France. The emperor Charles VI ate a dish of mushrooms, and the mushrooms killed him. Young Frederick at once gathered an ominous mass of troops near the Silesian borders. What were his intentions? Cardinal de Fleury would have given much to know. The cardinal thought of the poet and the poet thought of the cardinal. A present of the *Anti-Machiavelli* and a letter from Voltaire drew from the cardinal a little masterpiece of diplomatic subtlety, obviously intended for Frederick's perusal.

Voltaire, when he received this letter, was actually in Berlin. He had yielded to the royal cajoleries and to his own inclination, but he did not intend to pay a long visit to the Prussian court.

In actual fact, there was little cause for Madame du Châtelet's fears. Voltaire's affection for the marquise, if it was neither profound nor exacting nor passionate, was a real affection. She could never have taxed him justly with being unfaithful to her. As he himself had said, he was no Cartesian comet. His moods and variations may have been trying enough, but they were

signs, not of a natural flightiness, but of the range and vigour of his mind. And the marquise was exceptionally well fitted to be his companion. The only qualities which could win his respect and admiration were intellectual qualities which resembled his own, and Madame du Châtelet possessed those qualities in a remarkable degree. A stupid woman, no matter how loving and loyal, would have driven him crazy. On the other hand, her intelligence was not insufferably acute ; it was, in truth, decently and becomingly inferior to his ; but not too inferior ; it was finely adjusted and finely responsive to his particular needs.

Voltaire had no thought of disloyalty when he set out for Potsdam. He had meant what he said when he told Frederick that he would never leave the marquise, and he would have been shocked, incredulous, or even amused, if any one had now told him that he was making her unhappy. Perhaps there are no cruelties more piercing than the unconscious cruelties of the egoist. It seemed proper enough, to him, that he should play the lion at Frederick's court, the pet of a whole royal family and the favorite of a king—and was he not, in a sense, the ambassador of France ? What prodigious importance, and what a great adventure ! How could the vainest of men resist these invitations ? He had, besides, the exquisite joy of humiliating his enemies at the French court by showing them how well he was entertained, and how highly esteemed, at the court of this great emperor.

The cost of the journey and the cost of the entertainment had been the subject of negociations between the king and the poet. In this extraordinary bargaining, Voltaire had the best of it, and Frederick agreed—not without lamentation—to settle the bill.

" His appearance for six days only," wrote the king, " will cost me five hundred and fifty crowns a day. Good payment for a fool ; the jester of a great nobleman had never such wages." And yet these two strange men could find in each other's company the rare delight of mutual appreciation without jealousy, and each had for the other a radical sentiment of true esteem.

Life at the court was pleasantly informal. Voltaire was gay and brilliant, and seldom complained of indisposition. There was much making and reading of odes, and much talking of scandal. There was dancing, gaming and feasting ; and at night, Frederick would play " two or three concertos " upon the flute. The charming Sophia Wilhelmina, Margrave of Bayreuth and sister of the king, smiled prettily at Voltaire, whose vivacious gallantry amused her.

Who would have thought of the mustering and marching of Frederick's grim troops upon the borders of Silesia ? Who would have seen, in the pale, slender young man, trilling such light ritornellos upon his flute, the dreadful power which threatened Europe ?

From the court of Remusberg, Voltaire went to Berlin, to pay his respects to the queen-mother, Prince Henry and the royal sisters ; and here he sent a note to Maupertuis : " My dear owl of a wandering philosopher, come and dine to-day at M. de Valori's, and if he is dining with M. de Beauvau, we'll eat at M. de Beauvau's. I must needs embrace my philosopher before I take leave of the amiable, singular and worthy whore who arrives presently." The person so described is none other than Frederick. Those who believe that Voltaire was always elegant should remember this note.

On the 2nd or 3rd of December, the awful little man started on his return to Brussels, cursing his German

postillions, cursing the cheerless inns of Westphalia, cursing the atrocious winter roads, on which straps, wheels or axles were so easily broken. He had enjoyed himself. He had been monstrously flattered. He had been treated like a great man, and had flirted with a princess.

But what had come of the diplomatic mission? Little enough. He wrote briefly to de Fleury, telling him that Frederick had seen his letter. "He is the more sensible of your praises because he deserves them, and methinks he will continue to deserve those of all the nations of Europe. 'Tis to be wished, for their welfare, or at least for that of the greater part, that the king of France and the king of Prussia should be friends. That is your business. . . ." That is your business! The little man in the post-chaise, jolting along the Westphalian roads, grinning and cursing, and observing all with his quick, malevolent eyes, had very different ideas in his head.

Poor Madame du Châtelet, meanwhile, was ill at Brussels. She had fretted herself into a fever of anxiety, and believed she was dying.

"I have been cruelly paid," she wrote," for all that I have done at Fontainebleau; I have brought to a happy end the most difficult affair in the world. I have obtained for M. de Voltaire an honourable return to his country; I have recovered, for him, the good will of the minister; I have open'd, for him, the road to the Academies. . . . Do you know how he rewards so much zeal and so much affection? When he left for Berlin, he told me of it drily, knowing well it would pierce me to the heart, and he has abandoned me to a sorrow without example . . . the fever has got hold of me, and I hope to finish soon, like the unhappy Madame de Richelieu."

Yet the poor lady, as she soon knew, to her joy, was mistaken. The voyage to Berlin was a mere excursion of vanity—delightful escapade, if it had not been for those damned slushy roads and those boorish Westphalians, who thought you were asking for beer when you asked for a nag or a post-chaise. Even on the way back, rhyming to the plosh of the horses' feet, he had reeled off whole strings of paltry doggerel verses to Frederick, and had reminded him of his devotion to Emilie :

> "You open with a hardy hand
> The horrid gates of war ;
> While I come back to this dear land
> And her, whom I adore."

Voltaire did not return directly to Brussels. He came back by way of the Hague, where he was delayed for more than a week by frozen waterways. When, early in January, he reached the house in the Rue de la Grosse-Tour, Madame du Châtelet was more anxious for his health than for her own, but he arrived well and in lively spirits. Fears and tears were at an end, and there was no more talk of dying.

His chief concern was now the production of *Mahomet*. The tragedy had been polished again and again, and was ready for the players. Thalia Quinault had retired, the great Dufresne was away, and there was a certain risk in presenting the play to a Parisian audience. The actor-producer, La Noue, offered his theatre and his company at Lille. The offer was gladly accepted, and at Lille, accordingly, early in May, 1741, *Mahomet* was played four times with great success. Lord Chesterfield, who had met Voltaire, and happened to be in Lille soon after the performances, honoured the tragedy with

his genteel though reserved approval, and was astonished to find that the clergy had taken it in such good part. He had reason to be surprised. *Mahomet* is essentially an attack upon revealed religion, and there can be no doubt as to the intention of such lines as these :

> " O, Superstition, thy exacting laws
> Rob feeling hearts of all Humanity !
> . . . . . .
> Promise or threaten, so the Truth be known ;
> Let them adore my God, but fear him most."

But the bourgeois society of Lille was not ill disposed towards the author. It was a society which comprised that pert, silly and vulgar woman, Madame Denis, Voltaire's niece, and her pompous husband, the war commissioner. What is more, there had been a moment of gratifying excitement during the first representation. A dispatch from the King of Prussia had been brought to the house and handed to Monsieur de Voltaire. And Monsieur de Voltaire, with his fine sense of opportunity, had read the dispatch to the audience. It gave the news of Frederick's great victory at Mollwitz. It might just as well have told them anything else : what mattered was that it came from an emperor, and was now read in the playhouse by the emperor's friend to the good citizens of Lille. Loud huzzaing and loud clapping of hands. *Mahomet* was a fine play, and no one could reasonably doubt it.

We can pass over the metaphysical brawling with de Mairan, Koenig and Maupertuis which was occasioned by Madame du Châtelet's little book on the *Institutions of Physicks*. It was not seemly for a woman to write on such matters. " Born without talent, without memory, without imagination," wrote the queen of cats, " she

made herself a geometrician so as to appear above other women, not perceiving that singularity is not superiority." And yet the public had the bad taste to like her book, and to make sport of a worthy fellow like de Mairan.

There was a short visit to Cirey in June, and time to experiment with de S'Gravesande's machine for "fixing the image of the sun." Then there was a return to Brussels, and then a stay in Paris, but not yet in the vast Hotel Lambert which Madame du Châtelet had acquired some two years previously, and which Voltaire intended to make so luxurious and wonderful "if he could find the money." Back to Brussels, and back to Paris again, with occasional visits to Cirey. The dreary lawsuit was turning in du Châtelet's favour. There was less need to keep in close touch with the notaries.

Voltaire was happy, in good humour, and for a little while in security and peace. A letter written from Cirey to d'Argenson, on the 11th of January, 1742, is full of humanity and wit :

"Brother Macaire and Brother Francis are commended, Sir, to your benevolence. Brother Macaire is a little hermit who knows not his catechism, but who is good, simple and sweet, and earns a livelihood by cleaning old pictures, patching up old chairs and bedaubing windows and doors. He lives in the forest of Doulevant, one of our estates near Cirey. He passes in the district for a good religious man, seeing that he does no harm, and is useful. His hermitage is a little chapel which belongs to the Duke of Orleans ; he is desirous of obtaining a little permit to remain and be establish'd there.

"I believe there is, at Toul, a sort of Hermit-General

who makes 'em travel about like the devil of Popefiggery, and Brother Macaire has no wish to travel. Madame du Châtelet, who finds this hermit a good fellow, would be mighty pleased if he could remain in his chapel, whence he would come now and then to ply his trade at Cirey. And so, Sir, if you could give Brother Macaire a patent as Hermit of Doulevant, or a permit to rest there as best he can, Madame du Châtelet would thank you, and you would be blessed by God and by Saint Antony.

"As for Brother Francis, 'tis myself, Sir, who am even more of an hermit than Brother Macaire, and would leave my hermitage only to pay my respects to you. Here I live between study and friendship, even happier than Brother Macaire ; and had I but health, I wou'd envy no one's Destiny ; but health is not mine, and denies me even the pleasure of writing to you as often as I could wish. Instead of going to Paris, we are off, Brother Francis and Sister Emilie, to Franche-Comté, in the midst of snow and ice. One might have chosen a more agreeable time, but Madame d'Autrey is ill (we lodg'd with her in Paris). Friendship and good works know not the seasons."

He was a strange man, who could thus unite such loveable qualities of gentleness and humour with such blind fury and such biting spite. Learning, this year, that his old enemy, bookseller Jore, was in distress, he sent him a present of 300 livres : Jore, full of penitence and gratitude, felt the nobility of this revenge, and protested that he had been "seduced by monsters."

An awkward affair in the summer of 1742 seemed likely to undo all Madame du Châtelet's good offices with the ministers, if not to put Voltaire once again in

danger of the Bastille. By some means, we cannot say how, a foolish letter from Voltaire to his "adorable king" Frederick was being handed about in Paris. Voltaire denied the letter, but it was clearly his, and he admitted as much to Frederick himself. Frederick was inclined to believe that a clerk in the post office at Brussels had made a copy of the letter and sent it to the French government. For reasons among which may be reckoned the delicate political situation, nothing was done ; but the affair was none the less regrettable, and the more so as it occurred shortly before the first performance of *Mahomet* in Paris.

Mahomet was played before a very distinguished audience at the Comédie on the 19th of August, 1742. The buzzing of Piron and Desfontaines among the devout, and even in the very ears of de Fleury, had prepared every one for a new scandal. Nor were the Jansenists idle. It was pointed out by a doctor of the Sorbonne that Mahomet and Jesus-Christ were both names of three syllables—whence it was clear enough that the tragedy was a blasphemous attack upon the Christian church. The ministers of Lille had not been so perspicacious. But in such cases, learning, of course, settles the matter. It is true enough, buzzed Piron and Desfontaines ; this indecent thing ought never to be performed. Yet, in spite of these cabals, *Mahomet* was received with a great outburst of enthusiasm. It was played three times ; and then the noise on both sides had become so angry and shrill, there was such a fear of grave disturbances, that the author, not without a whisper from de Fleury, was prevailed upon to withdraw his piece.

Voltaire left Paris with bitter resentment. The Jansenists, he thought, had wrecked his play : by God !

he would dedicate *Mahomet* to the Pope. And this is what the devilish man actually did, as we shall see.

There were three days of revelry at Rheims with M. de Pouilli, then Brussels, and then a short visit by Voltaire to Frederick at Aix-la-Chapelle. Frederick did all in his power to entice the poet to Berlin ; but Voltaire was unshakably loyal to the marquise. He had written about Frederick and Madame du Châtelet in one of his delightful letters to Falkener not long before :

" You will hear of the new victory of my good friend the King of *Prussia*, who wrote so well against Machiavel, and acted immediately like the heroes of Machiavel. He fiddles and fights as well as any man in christendom. He routs the *Austrian* forces, and loves but very little *your* King, his dear neighbour of *Hanover*. . . . He would retain me at his court, and live with me in one of his country houses, just with the same freedom and the same goodness of manners you did at Wandsworth. But he could not prevail against the marquise du Châtelet. My only reason for being in France, is that I am her friend."

The death of Cardinal de Fleury on the 29th of January, 1743, a man never well disposed towards Voltaire, but too clever and too old to be openly hostile, left vacant a place in the Academy. Voltaire desired this place for himself, and the brilliant success of *Merope* on the 20th of February gave him no small encouragement.

Never had a piece been received with such a tumult of applause, and never before had the people shouted so loudly and so persistently for the author. And never—if that is possible—had the critics been more

completely in the wrong. Even Thalia Quinault, and friendly d'Argental had predicted failure. And here was the entire house, singing and shouting, clapping and stamping, and Voltaire blushing (which really does seem incredible) and kissing the hand of Madame de Luxembourg, or, according to his own account, being kissed by Madame de Villars.

But a mere theatrical success could not open the doors of the Academy. Easier for the rich to enter heaven than for a blasphemer to take his place among those forty righteous men. The Bishop of Mirepoix, Boyer, and the minister, Maurepas, excluded him. The Bishop of Bayeux took de Fleury's chair. Voltaire was to return a little later, when men were less righteous, or more reasonable, but now he was checked. Nor was this the only blow, for the tragedy of *Julius Caesar* was prohibited at the Comédie after the last rehearsal.

The poet, with bitter words of despair and hatred—words excusable enough, we may think—stormed out of Paris, and took up residence in the great ruinous palace of the King of Prussia at the Hague. Madame du Châtelet was left in Paris, and left again to all the tortures of uncertainty. All that she could do, poor soul, was to get the ban removed from *Julius Caesar*; and all that she could hope for was to join Voltaire later at Brussels. What she feared, and feared with reason, was that he would now hurry to Berlin on the first opportunity. This was precisely what he intended to do.

And now we see him turning to fresh activities. It may be said delicately that he undertook a political mission, or bluntly that he became a spy.

It had come into the minds of de Richelieu and of Madame de Chateauroux, the king's mistress, that his intimacy with Frederick might very well be of service

to the state. The king himself had approved of the design, Voltaire had eagerly agreed, and matters had been arranged by d'Argenson, the Minister for War, and Amelot, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Voltaire observes brutally in his *Memoirs* that Madame du Châtelet would have raised "a horrible outcry" if she had not been told of what was going on; and it was decided, in order "to appease her," that all documents should pass through her hands. We read this, as we read only too many of his words, with a sensation of profound contempt. It is not pleasant, either, to find him bargaining for an army forage contract as one of his conditions, and begging a military decoration for his nephew La Houlière.

Frederick was busy reviewing his troops, and Voltaire had to wait for a while at the Hague. His time was not wasted.

The ruinous embassy at the Hague was the residence of the Prussian envoy, Count Podewils. The Count was a pretty young man, loved by the wife of one of the Dutch ministers. He was thus able to obtain from his mistress confidential documents of the highest importance, which he obligingly passed on to Voltaire, and which Voltaire passed on to his friends. Nor was this all. The movements of Dutch troops and generals could be reported, the embassy gossip could be retailed, and young Podewils was ready enough to communicate the dispatches of his royal master. History is made by these little acts of courtesy.

While Voltaire was thus busily and happily engaged in his new profession, Frederick did his best to prevent his return to Paris. Voltaire had written some stinging verses on Boyer, the Bishop of Mirepoix, and sent them in one of his letters to Frederick, and Frederick now

had these verses conveyed secretly and by devious ways to the Bishop.

But Frederick knew nothing of Voltaire's political mission. It was all very well for the outraged Boyer to complain, as he did, to the court. The court replied that all this was according to plan—the poet wished it to be understood that his quarrel with Boyer was one of his reasons for leaving France. Thus, without meaning it, the infamous Frederick was playing the game of the man who was being sent to spy upon him. Voltaire was informed of this, and although he professed indignation, his sense of importance must have been most agreeably flattered. On the 30th of August, 1743, the poet arrived in Berlin for the second time.

The six weeks which followed were full of excitement. Frederick was more cordial than ever ; he did not " smell the spy " until the spy was on the point of taking his departure. There was a gay exchange of madrigals with Princess Ulrica, the sprightly girl who afterwards became queen of Sweden. A whole fortnight was spent in the marble salons and laequered boudoirs of that delicious margrave, Sophia-Wilhelmina of Bayreuth. Life was light and joyous ; it was a round of gallant festivals, alternating with moments of delightful intimacy, when Voltaire could talk with his " adorable king," or gaze romantically, with Sophia-Wilhelmina, across the shadowy gardens of the Bayreuth *Hermitage*.

Yet he had still an eye for the tall battalions of the Potsdam guard. The diplomat was not asleep this time, and Frederick was discreetly sounded. But Frederick was the last man in the world who could be called a fool ; and Frederick was cautious, if not mistrustful. In diplomacy, he was more than a match for the poet. He thought of Louis XV as every intelligent man must

have thought of that selfish imbecile, but he spoke of him "with respectful esteem." Amelot had to be content with a few scraps of information, and with one long and remarkable dispatch from Charlottenburg :

"To-day, after a dinner full of gaiety and compliments, the King of *Prussia* came to my room; he told me that he had been mighty glad to seek the French envoy yesterday, alone of all the ministers, not only to mark his consideration, but to vex those who were made uneasy by this preference. . . .

"Sire, said I, great kings know nothing of revenge : all must give way to the interests of the State ; you know whether 'tis not in the interest of Your Majesty and of *France* to be for ever united.

"The King of *Prussia* then said: How can I believe that *France* really has the intention of allying herself with me ? I know that your ambassadour at Maintz has made insinuations against me, and that peace with the Queen of *Hungary*, the re-establishment of the Emperour and reparations at my expense have all been proposed.

"I'll wager, said I, that such an accusation is a mere *Austrian* trick, of a sort too common with them. Did they not slander you in this fashion last May ? Did they not have it said in *Holland* that you had proposed to the Queen of *Hungary* to join her against *France* ?

"I swear to you, said he, but with lowered eyes, that nothing is more false. What should I have to gain thereby ? Such a lie destroys itself.

"Then, Sire, why not openly unite yourself with *France* and the Emperour against the common enemy, who hates you and slanders you both equally ? What other *ally* should you have, but *France* ?

"You are right, he replied. . . . But I can only act openly when I am assur'd of the support of the *Empire*. . . . If the Queen of *Hungary* is desirous of taking back *Silesia*, she will force me to take *Bohemia* from her. I am not in the least afraid of *Russia* : the *Czarina* is eternally devoted to me since the last conspiracy fomented by Botta and the *English*. I advise her to send young Ivan and his mother to *Siberia*, as well as my brother-in-law, with whom I have always been displeas'd, and who has always been ruled by the *Austrians*.

"The King would have continued, but he was inform'd his *Musick* was ready. . . ."

Such, in substance, was the dispatch of Charlottenburg, and such the alleged conversation of the king. Even so, with some assistance, perhaps, from the diplomat's easy pen, it was a guarded conversation. The question of a French alliance was left in the air, and Frederick's designs in regard to Hungary and Silesia were already clear enough. Frederick and Voltaire parted, early in October, with all the effusions and tender reproaches of an elderly coquette and a young lover ; but each had seen, and seen clearly, the snake in the grass.

CHAPTER V

DEATH OF THE MARQUISE

VOLTAIRE was now approaching his forty-ninth year. He was one of the best known and one of the most hated men in France. He had not yet produced those rollicking masterpieces of irony which have given him such a great name among writers, but he was known as the author of many fine tragedies, of the great national epic and other poems, of histories and philosophical works. He was known, too, by the vigour and variety of his correspondence. If he had not been so offensive personally, so combative and so arrogant, he might even then have been acknowledged as one of the grandest writers of his age.

He had the reputation also of being a man of affairs, a busy negociator, ambitious, and not too nice in matters of strategy. He may have had less power than men gave him credit for, but he had power enough to raise a multitude of enemies. We must remember that he was naturally defiant. He had started in life with a bitter sense of social and physical inferiority, and a clear perception of his own immense intellectual vigour. He had been treated with cruelty and stupidity by noblemen, by courtiers, pedants, ministers and men of letters. He had been insulted publicly by rogues. Even if he had won the favour of dukes and princes, he knew the cost of that favour, and he knew how little it was to be depended upon. Before blaming what may appear to be outrageous vanity, we should plainly understand the effect of early humiliations and of unpardonable affronts upon a sensitive and abnormally vigorous mind. He was determined, at any cost, to

justify himself and to prove his importance. A very great man, perhaps, would have been content to leave the fools laughing and to ignore the black inventions of envy, hatred and malice : but here was one who saw in these, not merely a personal affront, but so many hideous forms of the Infamous, which had to be fought unceasingly and fought to the death.

Desnoiresterres, that industrious biographer, is certainly wrong in saying that Voltaire had now forgotten his marquise. True, he had only written to her once or twice during his travels in Germany, but she had never been driven from his mind. When he was on the way home, in October, he wrote to Maupertuis : " I might thus, in my pacifick sphere, enjoy fully the goodness of the king of Prussia, but you know that a greater sovereign, named Madame du Châtelet, calls me back to Paris." Yet he had allowed her again to suffer bitterly in his absence, and she had written pathetic and despairing letters to their mutual friend, the good d'Argental.

" It is impossible," she said, " to love more tenderly or to be more unhappy." Why had he spent so many days at Bayreuth ? " He sends me at last four lines on the road . . . without giving me the reasons for his stay at Bayreuth, nor for his silence ; without telling me about his return, or his new visit to Berlin." But once again, when they met at Brussels, all was forgiven and all forgotten in the joy of being together.

After a little travelling to and fro, Voltaire and the marquise returned to their beloved Cirey. " At Cirey in felicity," he said. The diplomat had not yet been rewarded for his work at the Hague and Berlin, but the minister Amelot was about to fall, and the diplomat had to wait for a while. What did it matter ? Never

before had Cirey been so truly a paradise, never before had geometry been so divine, chemistry so alluring. Here indeed was happiness, delightful seclusion, and the quiet pleasures of country life and country gossip. And here Voltaire could lie comfortably in bed, engaged upon new works of every conceivable kind. It is probable that he was never so happy or so tranquil as he was during the five weeks that he now spent at Cirey.

In the early autumn, Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet were in Paris, and soon after the beginning of the new year (1745) Voltaire was at Versailles, busily preparing his opera-ballet of the *Princess of Navarre*.

This *Princess* was a mere court piece, which Voltaire affected to despise, written for the marriage festivities of the Dauphin. It was played in the great Salle de Ménage at Versailles on the 25th of February, before a brilliant concourse of royalty and nobility. Louis, who was capable of appreciating a ballet, liked the piece ; he was discreetly reminded of Voltaire's great services to literature and the state, and he rewarded him by the post of Historiographer to the King.

The poet could now be seen in the gardens of Versailles, trundled about in a little carriage drawn by the King's footmen. Heaven knows with what distaste or jealousy or amusement this peculiar sight was observed by the courtiers. Voltaire himself knew well enough that he owed his new dignity (and he would have chosen some other word for it), not to a true recognition of his achievement, but to a " mere farce," a command performance, and the good disposition of his friends, Madame de Pompadour, d'Argenson and de Richelieu. It was nothing more than a good disposition on the part of Madame de Pompadour ; she was too wise to associate herself closely with a man who was so liable to com-

promise his patrons. And Voltaire was the last man who was likely to keep his balance among the shifting intrigues of a court. As the friend of Madame de Pompadour, he was already threatened with the enmity of the small though influential group which had formed itself round the queen. Such groups are formed, not through sympathy with abandoned queens, but as oppositions to the favourite, pivoting on their natural centre. The poet was no longer the queen's "poor Voltaire," and Marie Leczinska, now a disillusioned woman of middle-age, pale, devout and cold, had little liking for the author of the *English Letters* and *Mahomet*.—Voltaire, as the lacqueys trundled him along the trim drives of Versailles, must have felt that his court reputation was hardly more solid than the elegant shell of the *calèche à bras* in which he was riding.

The bloody and glorious battle of Fontenoy, so happily restoring the moral of the army and the confidence of the nation (shaken rudely enough at Dettingen), was duly sung by the new historiographer. The poet was apparently in favour at court, and it seemed to be a proper occasion for making ridiculous advances to the Vatican.

Having actually won a couple of holy medals from the Pope, Voltaire proceeded to offer him the dedication of *Mahomet*. And the good Pope, with "greetings and apostolic blessings to his dear son," accepted the dedication. He was, so he said, exceedingly well pleased with the play, and with the beautiful *Ode* on Fontenoy, as well as with the pretty verses which M. de Voltaire had been kind enough to write for his own portrait.

The Pope was not deceived. He was a subtle, courteous and amiable old man, who, from his saintly eminence, could afford to smile indulgently and without

malice upon the vanities and policies of the world. He was a scholar ; Voltaire's genius delighted him ; his impudence amused him ; and he was clever enough to play at the same game of compliments with dignity and grace. As for the less dignified poet, it pleased him to think of himself as " a Popish dog, much addicted to His Holiness, and like to be saved by his power."

By the autumn, Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet were at the court of Fontainebleau : he as the royal historian, and she as a lady-in-waiting to the queen. Here he conceived the idea of writing a history of the recent campaigns, and among those whom he invited to help him was Falkener, now private secretary to the Duke of Cumberland. He did not know, when he first wrote, that the Falkener who was now attached to His Grace was the same Falkener, his old friend, who had been appointed to the embassy at Pera. He wrote to him with delight, in English more cordial than accurate :

" My dear and honourable friend, how could I guess your musulman person had shifted *Galata* for *Flanders*, and had passed from the *seraglio* to the Closet of the Duke of Cumberland ? . . . Had I thought it was my dear sir Everard who was secretary to the great prince, I had certainly taken a journey to *Flanders*. My duty is to visit the place where your nation gave such noble proofs of her steady courage. An historian ought to look on and view the theatre, in order to dispose the scenery of the work. . . . But what greater reason, what better motive than my friendship for you ? "

The king's triumphant return to Versailles in November was celebrated by another court piece,

The Temple of Glory. In this new piece, a flimsy allegory represented Louis as the noble Trajan ; but Louis, perhaps a little embarrassed by such flattery, viewed the *Temple* with chilly indifference. A new diversion was contemplated—a mere musical trifle, the *Fêtes de Ramire*, adapted, scored and prepared for the stage by the " citizen of Geneva," Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was thus, in December 1745, that these two great men were brought into correspondence for the first time.

A more important business occupied Voltaire seriously in the following year. The death of President Bouhier on the 17th of March again left a place vacant in the Academy. Surely the king's historiographer, the singer of Fontenoy, might aspire to that place ? Had not the Pope given his blessing to the tragedy of *Mahomet* ? He had several direct claims upon the royal patronage ; what is more, he had the support of the royal favourite, splendid Pompadour, to whom he had already addressed some rather warm and hardy odes. Even the ass Mirepoix would hardly dare to oppose him. But the Jesuits had to be soothed, and for this purpose he wrote and published a curious profession of orthodoxy and innocence, a curious appreciation of the learning, piety and noble works of the Order of Jesus, addressed to old Father de la Tour, the principal of the college of Louis-le-Grand, and one of the mild instructors of his youth. He speaks of a scribbler who would injure him (was he thinking of the poet Roy, of Desfontaines or the " vile Rufus " ?) :

" The authour of the libel may set my name as often as he pleases in the immense and forgotten volume of his calumnies. . . . I will answer him as the great

Corneille did on a like occasion : *I submit my writings to the Judgement of the Church*. . . . I will do more indeed : I will declare to him and to those who resemble him, that if I have ever printed one page which could offend even the sacristan of their village, I am ready to tear it up before his very eyes ; that I wish to live and die tranquilly in the bosom of the Catholick, Roman and Apostolick Church, without attacking any man, without maintaining the slightest opinion which could offend any man ; I hate everything which can trouble society in the least degree. 'Tis these sentiments, known to the *King*, which have won me his kindness. Overwhelm'd by his favours, attach'd to his royal person, charg'd to write of the great and glorious things he has done for his country, solely occupied by this work, I shall endeavour, in accomplishing it, to put into practice the lessons I have learned in your respectable *Establishment* ; and if the rules of eloquence which I was there taught should be effac'd from my *memory* the character of a good citizen shall never be effac'd from my *heart*."

In following a chosen policy, a man need not be wholly insincere. Voltaire had a lively affection for his old masters, and he was always ready to admit how much he owed them. Here, at least, he spoke the truth. But these declarations were not enough : he called upon all his friends to assist him, to make ready the way for his advance and victory. He was elected on the 25th of April, 1746.

He was not allowed to enjoy his triumph in peace. His enemies buzzed about him more angrily than ever before. On the very eve of his election, the poet Roy, who thought himself good enough for the Academy, had revived and revised a brutal satire on the early

misfortunes of Arouet, and had it circulated among the booksellers of Paris.

Now, in addition to Roy's *Poetick Triumph*, came a whole swarm of stinging though obscure pamphlets. Voltaire turned upon his mean tormentors with a wasteful and disproportionate fury. He pursued them all—hawkers, booksellers and writers. He set the law in motion. Houses were entered, papers were seized, men were flung into prison. With particular energy he pursued a wretched fiddler, Travenol, who played at the Opera. We need not follow these drab affairs ; it is enough to note that the anxieties of legal procedure and the uncertainty of legal judgments, seemed to him even more abominable than the offences they were supposed to correct. On future occasions, he was less ready to call in the police.

It is more pleasing to record his friendship with two needy young men, whose names are well known to students of French literature : Vauvenargues and Marmontel.

Poor Vauvenargues, a frail, unhappy man, was only thirty-one years old in 1746, and he died in the following year. He was a gentle, thoughtful soul, and a very graceful and skilled writer. No man was less fitted for the exercise of arms, yet Vauvenargues had been a captain in the king's regiment, and had fought at the siege of Prague in 1741. His health was irremediably broken in the campaign.

Marmontel, in 1746 a lad of twenty-three, has given a delightful picture of a conversation between Voltaire and his friend Vauvenargues : "Never did any one bring to a discussion more spirit, good will and sweetness of temper, and what charmed me even more was, on the one side, the respect of Vauvenargues for the genius of Voltaire, and on the other, Voltaire's tender venera-

tion for the merit of Vauvenargues : each, without flattery or vain adulation or weak complaisance, seemed honoured by a freedom of thought which never troubled the harmony and agreement of their mutual ideas."

As for Mårmontel, he was a country boy with a real aptitude for letters, though he was never a great writer. Voltaire had met him in the rooms of his friend Vauvenargues, and assisted him for many years with his money and influence.

Gentle Vauvenargues and penniless Marmontel—the one owed to Voltaire the happiest moments of a life that was nearly over, and the other owed him support and generous encouragement in a career that had scarcely begun.

On the 22nd of December, 1746, " Sieur Arouet de Voltaire, Historiographer of France and one of the forty of the French Academy," became a Gentleman in Ordinary to the King. It looked as though *le Sieur de Voltaire* might reckon upon a continuance of royal favours.

But the wretched man was never long out of trouble. After a visit, with Madame du Châtelet, to the Duchess of Maine at Anet, where the farce of *Boursouffle* was played by a company of noble amateurs, Voltaire and the marquise returned to the court at Fontainebleau. Here, one evening, there was high play at the queen's tables. Madame du Châtelet, a hardy gambler, had, or seemed to have, the most extraordinary ill luck. She lost 400 louis. It was all that she had in her purse—indeed, it was all the ready money that she had been able to get together. On the following evening, she played with 200 louis borrowed from, or given by, the poor historiographer. She lost them.

A real gambler is always encouraged by losses ; and

in spite of a few timid observations by Voltaire, a lacquey was quickly sent to the steward, Monsieur de la Croix. The steward as quickly borrowed another 200, and the amiable Mademoiselle du Thil, a former lady companion, added to this respectable sum a further 180 louis. Returning to the game with her usual vivacity, the marquise lost, not only her new provision, but a great deal more besides, pledged upon credit. At this, Voltaire, who was never a man of the world, could no longer contain himself. He said angrily to the marquise: "You might have perceived, Madam, that you was playing with rogues." This, or something like it, he said in English ; but the rash words were overheard and understood by some of the gamesters. There was nothing for it, now, but immediate flight.

For six weeks, or more, Voltaire remained in hiding at Sceaux, protected by his charming old friend, the Duchess of Maine. The shutters of his room were closed all day, and he worked—writing, always writing—by the light of candles. Then the storm died down, Madame du Châtelet settled her debts, and came to Sceaux to liberate the poet. But the stay at Sceaux was now cheerily prolonged : there was a round of balls, operas, concerts—and those delightful theatricals in which Madame du Châtelet played with such brilliance.

And then the new Gentleman in Ordinary found himself again in trouble. He had occasion to thank Madame de Pompadour for some little service, and sent her a gallant madrigal, with which she, for her part, was pleased enough. But the queen's party was highly scandalised. The queen's ladies, flocking to the king, pointed out the indelicacy of the offence. The king, readily moved as he was by the persuasion

of soft voices, agreed to banish Voltaire from the court. Madame de Pompadour, who had no time to intervene, heard of this with surprise, and no doubt with amusement. Whatever may have been the nature, term or intention of this banishment, Voltaire never returned to the court of France.

After a stay at Cirey, made gay with more theatricals, more comedies, proverbs and farces (divine Emilie the very life and soul of these various diversions), Voltaire and the marquise accepted the hospitality of King Stanislas at the court of Lunéville. Here they established themselves early in 1748.

We have already seen something of this remarkable court, with its faded elegance, its amiable affectation of learning and philosophy. In this court without politics, a king without ambition and a mistress without rivals led an easy, lazy, but very agreeable existence. There was nothing to do but to entertain or to be entertained, and the only administration was the free and casual administration of pure benevolence. King Stanislas, with his gentle ways and gentle raillery, was beloved by the people of Lorraine. Madame de Boufflers, too easy, perhaps, in more ways than one, had the rare merit of equability and the rare virtue of good nature.

No guests could have been more welcome at Lunéville. Stanislas, like old de Villars in earlier years, had a fatherly fondness for the poet, and a fatherly concern for his ill health. Madame de Boufflers was attracted by the liveliness and the many accomplishments of the marquise. We hear little, now, of the "hall of machines," the laboratory, but a great deal about plays and other diversions. On the 25th of February, Voltaire wrote to one of his "guardian angels," the Countess d'Argental:

"My pretended exile would be agreeable enough here, were I not so far from my dear angels. It is, truly, a delicious abode; 'tis an enchanted castle, whose master does the honours of it. Madame du Châtelet has been able to play *Issé* three times in a very elegant theatre, and *Issé* has been mighty well received. The king's company has played *Merope* for me. Would you believe it, Madam?—the good folk all cried just as they did in Paris. And I, who speak to you—I quite forgot myself, and cried like the others. We go every day to a kiosque, or from a palace to a cabin; and everywhere, feasting and freedom. I believe that Madame du Châtelet would spend her life here; but for my part, I prefer the close life and the charms of friendship to any festivals, and have a great desire to return to *your* court."

It was at Lunéville that Madame du Châtelet met Saint-Lambert, an officer in the ducal guards of Lorraine, a poet, and a charming though cynical and selfish young man. He became, some years later, the lover of Madame d'Houdetot, the woman who inspired Jean-Jacques Rousseau with such an ecstatic passion. Before long, Emilie's acquaintance with Saint-Lambert became an intimacy which was to have deplorable and fatal results.

We need not blame Madame du Châtelet too hastily. She was now forty-two years old, but still impetuous and passionate. For nearly fourteen years she had given Voltaire the full warmth of her affection, she had cared for him, nursed him, worked with him in a delicious community of taste and learning, and fought for his interest and security against the formidable intrigues of statesmen and courtiers. She gave him, still, her

friendship and admiration. Voltaire, if he had not taken all this, in the way of men, as a matter of course, if he had been always loyal at heart and grateful in thought, had treated her too often with a lack of understanding, and even with the appearance of gross neglect. He was fretful, impatient, exacting. He was a sick man, with all the querulous demands and all the teasing moods of a sick man. He was absorbed by the immense energies of production.

Madame du Châtelet turned to her new lover, not for understanding or friendship, but for emotional excitement. What is more, Voltaire himself always pretended to despise chastity, and to regard a woman's fidelity as nothing more than a mere matter of convenience. The licence of the age not only encouraged gallantry, and gallantry of the most promiscuous kind, but made of it a mark of breeding and a social habit. And so, when we see the poor marquise placing her love letters—letters with pink and blue edges—in Madame de Bouffler's harp, where Saint-Lambert took them and deposited his own, we should feel, if neither pity nor benevolence, at least no heartless or senseless indignation.

Voltaire was in Paris at the end of August, to see the performance of his new play *Semiramis*. At that time, the stage itself was crowded with a part of the fashionable audience, foes or partisans of the author, and the actors were frequently hindered by interference of the most direct and objectionable kind. What with bulky properties and a multitude of people, there was so little room on the stage when *Semiramis* was played that even the shade of Ninus was hardly able to make his appearance : the usher, so we are told, had to cry more than once " Make way, gentlemen, if you please ; make way for the ghost ! "

The tragedy was not entirely successful, although Voltaire's faction was powerful enough to hold the enemy in check. On the second night, having borrowed a cloak, a huge wig, a hat with lowered brims, and a pair of spectacles, the author betook himself to a coffee-house, and there listened, with horrible alternations of pride, anger and anxiety, to the mixed opinions of the critics.

He learnt, soon afterwards, that the Italian players were busy with a parody.

Here was a piece of wicked malice, not to be endured. The angry man wrote to the ministers ; he wrote to every one. He prayed, bullied, swore and bargained. He addressed himself to Madame de Pompadour, to the queen. He did not appeal in vain. " Madame de Pompadour," he wrote to d'Argental, " has done more than the queen. She has told me that the infamy will certainly not be performed." And yet, Madame de Pompadour was even then protecting, with almost filial piety, the aged Crébillon, whose shaky reading of *Catiline* had so greatly pleased, not only the grand lady herself, but also the king.

The tragedy of *Semiramis* was played at Fontainebleau, with approval, on the 24th of October : the parody was forbidden.

The court of Stanislas moved, at times, from Lunéville to Nancy or Commercy. It was at Commercy that Voltaire discovered, in the most conclusive and dramatic fashion, the weakness of the marquise. Of what actually occurred we know only from the gossiping record of a secretary, as much valet as secretary, and such records can have only a relative importance.

No doubt, the scene of discovery was painful enough, grotesque, violent, humiliating. But Voltaire, in a little time, had resigned himself. He was too vital or too volatile to be depressed for long by any imaginable circumstance, or to feel for long the influence of a single emotion. And he was now, let us remember, fifty-three years old. He made his peace, not only with the still divine Emilie, but also with her new lover. He is supposed to have said to Saint-Lambert : " My child, I have forgot all, and 'tis I alone who was in the wrong. You are at the happy age when men have and give delight ; enjoy these moments, which are all too brief ; an old, sick fellow such as I am, has nothing more to do with pleasure."

Then came a more staggering blow, and one which exposed the unhappy marquise to all the dark terrors of apprehension.

The two friends—for they were still friends—went to Cirey late in December. Here the marquise busied herself with her translation of the *Principles* of Newton, and with a graceful and learned commentary upon this great work. " The preface to her *Newton*," said Voltaire, " is a masterpiece." Once again, life at Cirey was quiet, studious, even happy. The neighbourly fireside purring of Madame de Champbonin, the peace of a calm winter countryside, the well-being which is felt in bright, familiar rooms, the grateful seclusion after so many noisy days of adventure, anxiety and peril—all this must have given them a sense of delightful security and repose. But soon Madame du Châtelet feared that all was not well, and then knew that she was pregnant.

Saint-Lambert was called to Cirey. There were conferences in which, if we are correctly informed,

ribaldry was not absent. Du Châtelet, that obliging simpleton, was duped, cajoled, and forced to play his part in a hideous comedy. We are glad to think that our account of this comedy does not come from a trustworthy source, though credited by Desnoiresterres.

There is little in the correspondence which indicates Voltaire's state of mind at this period. In an English letter to Falkener, written at the end of March, 1749, he says : " I have been disturbed these two months and kept from writing my history, which I hope will be the work of the historiografer of the honest man, rather than that of the historiografer to a king." He was naturally disturbed, but this disturbance was by no means wholly due to the condition of Madame du Châtelet.

Voltaire wished to be considered the one great tragic poet of the age. Nothing short of an undisputed pre-eminence, an acknowledged pre-eminence, could satisfy him. The wild hysterical vehemence with which he insisted upon his own superiority and deprecated the work of his rivals was due to a morbid weakness of character (but not an exceptional weakness) which we have already tried to explain. It was never more strongly, more regrettably in evidence than at this time, when old Crébillon's *Catiline* was being warmly applauded, not only by the parterre, but by the great Montesquieu. To Voltaire's alert vanity, such praises were intolerable. That Crébillon was a man of eighty, that his tragedy was a good one, made no difference. Any successful dramatist was a natural enemy, any good play a personal affront. His fury was not lessened when old Crébillon, nobly protected by Madame de Pompadour, became the royal censor of plays. To have his own work judged by a dotard who owed his position, not to merit, but to the unaccountable caprice

of a woman, was a thought which drove him crazy. He would write a *Catiline* of his own, immeasurably superior to anything Crébillon had ever thought of. What is more, he would confront the *Electra* of Crébillon with an *Orestes*. How could the poor creature think of writing or judging tragedies at his time of life? He should long ago have slipped quietly into his prepared tomb.

Meanwhile, on the 16th of June, Voltaire produced a new comedy, *Nanine*, based clearly on the *Pamela* of Richardson. It was interesting to part of the audience, though boring to another, and no one thought it a good comedy.

Voltaire returned to Lunéville from Paris before the short run of *Nanine* had come to an end. With Madame du Châtelet, he spent a few days at Cirey, and then settled again, with her, at the court of Stanislas.

Madame du Châtelet was now trying to chase away the terrors of her mind by work and excitement, by steady occupation or feverish activity. She had grim apprehensions of her approaching death. Childbirth at her age was an occurrence which no woman could anticipate without alarm. The poor lady put her affairs in order and wrote letters which, if she died, were to be sent to her friends. She had complained of the coldness, the indifference of Saint-Lambert; but now she was tender and resigned. We cannot pretend to judge Saint-Lambert, though he has never been described as an amiable character: he appears to have been selfish, callous perhaps, though not brutal; we know that he was deeply affected by Madame du Châtelet's fate. There is in existence an infinitely pathetic letter of the marquise to Saint-Lambert in which she reproaches him with not telling her of his plans.

"When I am with you, I can endure my state with patience, often without perceiving it; but when I lose you, all seems dark. . . . Do not leave me in this uncertainty; my suffering and lack of courage would frighten me if I believed in presentiments."

Voltaire, who had no presentiments, took matters lightly, or at least appeared to do so. Writing to Madame d'Argental in July, he said: "Madame du Châtelet, who sends you her compliments, counts on being deliver'd here of a fine boy, and I, of a tragedy; but methinks her child will be sturdier than mine." And in writing to Frederick soon afterwards, he promised to undertake the journey to Potsdam "as soon as Madame du Châtelet has recovered from her confinement."

On the night of the 4th of September, Madame du Châtelet was delivered. Voltaire, either believing sincerely that all danger was past, or affecting gaiety in order to keep up his courage, treated the matter in a jocular spirit. He wrote to d'Argental, telling him the news:

"Madame du Châtelet, while scribbling at her *Newton* to-night, felt a little uneasy; she call'd her chambermaid, who was just in time to receive a little lady and pop her into the cradle. The mother put her papers in order, got back into bed again; and both are now sleeping like a pair of dormice as I write to you. —I shall not be so easily delivered of my *Catiline*. Five days at least will be needed, so that I may forget the work, and take it up again with a fresh eye."

He wrote in the same style to his friend the Abbé de Voisenon:

" My dear Abbé *Greluchon* is to know that Madame du Châtelet, being this very night at her desk, according to her praiseworthy custom, said : But I feel something ! This something was a little lady who straightway came into the world. They plac'd her upon a *quarto* which happen'd to be there, and the mother went to bed. I who, during the last days of her confinement, knew not what to do with myself, set about making a child by myself ; I was brought to bed in eight days of *Catiline*. 'Tis a jest of Nature's, who would have me do, in one week, what Crébillon was thirty years a-doing. I marvel at Madame du Châtelet's delivery, and am horrified at my own."

And the same stories, the same pleasantries were repeated to the Marquis d'Argenson :

" Madame du Châtelet informs you, Sir, that being this night at her desk and scribbling some *Newtonian* affairs, she felt a little trouble. This little trouble was a young lady who straightway appeared. They put her upon a book of geometry *in-quarto*. The mother has gone to bed, because 'tis proper to go to bed ; and if she don't sleep, she will write to you. She has but brought into the world a little lady who has nothing to say ; but for my part, I must needs make a *Cicero*, a *Caesar* ; and 'tis more difficult to make these fellows talk than it is to make a child, especially when one has no mind to affront ancient *Rome* for a second time in the French theatre."—The last allusion is to Crébillon's tragedy, which Voltaire frequently called " an insult to ancient Rome."

For a time things looked well. Voltaire and Stanislas

could make their obstetrical jokes with a light heart ; and Saint-Lambert, who was then at the court of Lorraine, could feel that he had done no great harm after all. Poor Madame du Châtelet, though fatigued, was able to smile and talk, and was already asking for her Newtonian papers. The child was put out to nurse. Du Châtelet himself was there—the inoffensive, gentle and silly man, who had been so wickedly fooled, and who was now to be the witness of a tragedy for which he believed, perhaps, that he was mainly responsible.

Four days after her delivery, Madame du Châtelet fell sick of a fever. The king's physician, Reynault, called in two doctors from Nancy. What could they do but look wise, or sad, or puzzled ?

A gloomy company, with tears not far from their eyes, gathered in Madame du Châtelet's room. The marquise, no longer thinking about Newton, was tended with care by loyal Mademoiselle du Thil, who had come to Lunéville to wait upon her former mistress. Reynault and his two colleagues devised a palliative, a febrifuge, heaven knows what, and the sick woman, on the second day of the fever, seemed more tranquil, inclined to sleep. The company went to supper with Madame de Boufflers. No jokes now ; the shadow had fallen upon the court, upon the good Stanislas and amiable de Boufflers, so gay and so hopeful only two nights before. Who remained with the dying woman ? Not du Châtelet, not Voltaire, but Saint-Lambert, Longchamp the secretary, and Mademoiselle du Thil.

Soon after the others had left her, Madame du Châtelet died, presumably while sleeping under the influence of a soothing drug. " We were so troubled

that none of us thought of sending for curé or Jesuit or sacrament. She had none of the terrors of death : 'twas we alone who felt them."

The sorrows of those who are quick and volatile are not less intense, less cruel and penetrating, because they are short-lived ; nor is a grief less bitter because it may find relief in a spoken extravagance or in some wild gesture which, taken in itself, has little dignity. In whatever way Voltaire may have spoken or behaved on this occasion (and we must again hesitate before relying on the memory and veracity of a babbler such as Longchamp), his grief was profoundly real, and was literally overwhelming. His own letters are sufficient proof. We are less ready to think of him furiously accusing Saint-Lambert of having killed his friend, or miserably striking his head against the wall, than of good King Stanislas coming to the stricken man and comforting him with his own tears.

There is nothing more tragic in any correspondence than the change from his previous gaiety and relief to the cry of despair in Voltaire's letter to d'Argental, written a few hours after Madame du Châtelet's death :

" Ah ! my dear friend, I have only you in the world. What a crushing blow ! I have told you about the happiest, the most singular confinement : a terrible death has followed it ! And to crown my sorrows, I am oblig'd to remain for another day in this abominable Lunéville which has been the cause of her death. I am going to Cirey with M. du Châtelet ; thence I shall come back to weep in your arms for the rest of my unhappy life. Watch over Madame d'Argental for

us. Write to me at Cirey by Vassy. Have pity on me, dear and worthy friend. Write to me at Cirey : that is the one consolation for which I can hope."

In the same hour of bitter grief he wrote to Madame du Deffand—surely the most disagreeable and the most unfeeling of women. Voltaire did not often correspond with her at that time, and it is strange to find him writing to her, of all people, on this deplorable occasion :

" Madam, I have but now witness'd the death of one who was my friend for twenty years, one who loved you truly, and who spoke to me, two days before this melancholy death, of the pleasure she would have in seeing you in Paris on the occasion of her first visit. I had begg'd President Hénault to tell you of a confinement which appeared so singular and so happy ; there was much intended for you in my letter ; Madame du Châtelet had charged me to write to you, and I thought to fulfil my duty in writing to President Hénault. This unhappy little girl, of whom she was brought to bed, and who has caused her mother's death, did not sufficiently interest me. Alas ! Madam ; we had made of this event a matter of pleasantry ; and it was in this unseemly style I had wrote by her order to her friends. If anything could add to the horrors of my present state, it would be the fact of having treated with mirth an adventure whose consequences will poison the rest of my miserable life. I wrote you nothing when she was delivered, and now I have to tell you of her death. 'Tis to the sensibility of your heart that I turn in my despair. They are taking me to Cirey with M. du Châtelet. Thence I shall return to Paris, without

knowing what will become of me, and hoping soon to rejoin her. Allow me, as soon as I am arriv'd, to have the sad consolation of talking to you about her, and of bewailing, at your feet, a woman who, with all her weakness, had a spirit worthy of our respect."

Such a letter to such a woman! It was Madame du Deffand who had written so cruelly, so falsely and with such biting malice about the unhappy Emilie. It was she—the queen of cats—who had sneered at what she chose to regard as poor Emilie's pretensions, at her supposed vanity and meanness, and even at her poverty. And now, as though to add one more touch to the tragic-grotesque of this horrible drama, here is Voltaire addressing himself to the "sensibility of her heart," and ready to "weep at her feet." His own imagination could scarcely have conceived a more sinister refinement of irony.

He wrote next day to d'Argenson, and three days later to the Abbé de Voisenon :

"My dear Abbé, my dear *friend*, what have I wrote to you! What untimely joy, what direful consequence! What a complication of disasters, which, if 'tis possible, render my state even more dreadful. . . . I am not quitting M. du Châtelet, I am going to Cirey with him. I must needs go, and accomplish this sad duty. And so I shall see again the place adorn'd by friendship, where I hoped to die in the arms of your friend!"

Madame du Châtelet was buried in the new parish church of Lunéville with all the honours, pomp and ceremony that could be provided by the contrivance of Stanislas and the resources of his court. Voltaire was

overwhelmed by his grief. Good Stanislas took him to La Malgrange, and did what he could to comfort him, until the unhappy man decided to go to Cirey.

It would seem that Voltaire and du Châtelet arrived at Cirey on the 16th or 17th of September. Those must have been strange, melancholy days : Voltaire distracted, first by the poignancy of his memories, and then by his desire to collect his property and settle his affairs with du Châtelet ; du Châtelet himself rapidly fading, as far as we are concerned, into his final complete obscurity, with no word, no action to mark his passing ; Madame de Champbonin gently weeping, gently murmuring, and yet with a little cheerfulness breaking through ; and each, no doubt, aware of the painful and peculiar embarrassment of the situation.

The letters which Voltaire wrote at this period are of extraordinary interest. It is certainly wrong to suppose, with Desnoiresterres, that Madame du Châtelet was lightly loved and briefly regretted. The unreflecting mind is too ready to believe that a satirist is devoid of feeling, happily immune from the sorrows of mankind, incapable of sentiment, and even more so of the profound emotions. The very qualities of a satirist are those of a quick, nervous, acutely perceiving nature, and imply a more than common degree of sensibility. Lanson, though he is not much concerned with the emotional aspect of Voltaire, is right in saying that "He mourned sincerely the poor faithless woman, whom he had loved with a steady affection."

We cannot doubt this if we read his letters with understanding. He did not possess the orderly, controlled mind which he so much admired ; he had no repression, no reserve ; he had no spiritual privacy ; and whatever he felt or thought or desired was rapidly and vehemently

expressed in words or writing. He could not contain himself. And this very impulsiveness, untimely and distressing as it often was, made him, in a sense, the most truthful of men. In all that affected him deeply he was incapable of the least concealment. With all his power, he was a strangely unguarded man, never more pitiably mistaken than when he imagined himself able to perceive the thoughts of others and to hide his own. The following letters, written to intimate friends, are among the most remarkable in his entire correspondence.

To d'Argental, from Cirey, on the 21st of September :

" Adorable friend, I know not for how many days we shall yet remain in this house which friendship had embellish'd, and which has become for me an object of horror. 'Tis a sad duty I fulfil, and many sad things have I seen. I shall find no consolation but with you. You have wrote me letters which, in bringing tears to my eyes, have brought relief to my heart. I will start in three or four days, if my wretched health allows me to.

" I am like to die in this house ; an old friend of this unhappy lady weeps here with me ; and here I must do my duty by the son and the husband. There can be nothing more dreadful than what I have seen for the past three months, now finish'd by death. My state is appalling ; you will understand the bitterness of it, and your dear sympathies will make it less."

In a letter written to the same friend two days later, he speaks of Cirey with a changed attitude : it is no more " an object of horror." He contemplates residence in Madame du Châtelet's Paris house in the Rue Traversière.

" I will even admit that a house where she has lived, though it may fill me with anguish, is not wholly distressing to me. I do not fear my affliction ; I fly not from what speaks to me of her. I love Cirey ; I could not endure Lunéville, where I lost her in a manner more dreadful than you can imagine ; but the places she has adorn'd are dear to me. 'Tis not that I have lost a mistress ; I have lost a part of myself, a soul for whom my own was made, a friend of twenty years. . . . The tenderest father loves not otherwise his only daughter. I love to find everywhere some thought of her ; I love to talk with her husband, her son. Sorrows are never alike, and you see how mine are fashioned."

Ten days later, he was on the road to Paris, travelling by short stages.

" Here I am at Châlons," he wrote to d'Argental ; " I shall spend two or three days at Rheims with M. de Pouilly. 'Tis a mind like your own, and a true philosophick spirit ; 'tis the only society which can give me a little consolation, and in some measure take your place, if that is possible. I have but now been reading again the prodigious number of metaphysical notes which Madame du Châtelet had got together with such patience and perspicacity as astound me. With all that, how could she weep at our little tragedies ? 'Twas the genius of Leibnitz with sensibility added. Ah ! dear friend, who can measure this loss ? "

At Rheims, he could turn his attention to his work, and a fair copy of *Catiline* was prepared. He had found an excellent copyist—M. Tinois, who was no mere hack, but a ready rhymer. Tinois ventured to address

a little ode to Monsieur de Voltaire on the subject of *Catiline ;* an ode discreetly flattering, of course. What an admirable copyist ! said Monsieur de Voltaire : how astonishing that the fellow should have so much taste !

On the 12th of October, he wrote to Madame de Bocage :

" I am come to Paris, Madam. The excess of my sorrow and of my ill health does not prevent me from telling you how sensible I am of your kindness. A noble spirit such as yours must indeed regret such a woman as Madame du Châtelet. Like you, she was the glory of her sex in France. She was in philosophy what you are in elegant letters ; and this same lady, who had translated and explain'd *Newton* (who had done, that is, what three or four men in France might have been ask'd to accomplish) cultivated without ceasing, by the perusal of works of taste, that sublime spirit which nature had given her. Alas ! Madam, it was but four days previously that I had re-read your tragedy with her. We read together your *Milton*, with the English. You would have regretted her even more, had you been a witness of this reading. . . . After her death, four indifferent verses in her praise were being distributed. Folk who have neither taste nor sensibility have attributed them to me. They must indeed be unworthy of friendship, and have trivial minds, who could believe that, in my dreadful condition, I could have taken the wretched liberty of making verses for her ; but what is frightful, and deserving punishment, is that a monster named *Roy* has wrote verses against her memory."

There can be no possibility of mistaking either the

tenour or the sincerity of these letters. Nor is there less sincerity and less pathos in Voltaire's eulogies of the poor marquise.

He must indeed be devoid of understanding, who cannot see in this correspondence a bitter suffering both of heart and mind. It will be noticed, in the letters which follow, how Voltaire exaggerates the period of his alliance with Madame du Châtelet—twenty years, even twenty-five years. In reality, it was a period of about fifteen years, and this curious inaccuracy in the matter of dates and times will be observed frequently by any one who reads the correspondence. We shall take passages from three letters, written about the middle of October, from Paris. The first is to d'Arnaud :

" Dear child—a woman who has translated and explained *Newton*, and who has made a translation of *Virgil*, without the least hint in her conversation that she had accomplish'd these prodigies ; a woman who never said an ill thing of any one, and never spoke a falsehood ; a friend brave and sollicitous in friendship ; in one word, a very great man, known only to ordinary women by her diamonds, her cavagnole—you will not prevent me from mourning her all my life. I am far indeed from going to *Prussia* ; I can scarce leave the house."

The second is to the Chevalier de Jaucourt :

" My dear Sir, I arriv'd in Paris some days ago. I have found here the signs of your remembrance and of the goodness of your heart ; you must surely be of the number of those who lament this unique lady . . .

whose character was even superior to her genius. She never forsook a friend ; I have never heard her speak uncharitably. I have lived with her for twenty years in the same house. Never have I heard a lie pass her lips. I hope you will presently see her *Newton*. She has done what should have been undertook by the Academy of Sciences. Whoever can think will honour her memory, and I shall spend my life mourning her."

The next is to Frederick, to whom the loss of Madame du Châtelet must have been extremely gratifying :

" I have lost a friend of twenty-five years, a great man whose one fault was being a woman, and whom all Paris honours and regrets. Perhaps she did not receive full justice while she was alive, and you, perhaps, have not judg'd of her as you would have if she had had the honour of being known to Your Majesty. . . . The state in which I have been for the last month scarce allows me to hope that I shall see you again."

Voltaire was now established in the Rue Traversière, with his niece, that bouncing and pretentious woman, Madame Denis, keeping house for him. Cheered by his friends, d'Argental, young Marmontel, de Choiseul and the Abbé Chauvelin, he turned again to the normal concerns of his life. *Catiline* was read to the circle; *Orestes* made his appearance. Presently he was in full career. He had to prove his superiority, his plain, avowed superiority, to Crébillon, that maundering old playwright. He could even think of Potsdam again, for he was, as Lanson very truly observes, " ill cured of courts." On the 10th of November he told Frederick that he would visit him during the summer, " if he was

still alive." He busied himself with the practical, rather sordid question of the settlement of his accounts, amounting to 5,000 livres, with du Châtelet. His tremendous, undiscriminating energies were soon actively employed in a hundred ways.

But the marquise was never forgotten. Those who saw the old man at Ferney, five-and-twenty years later, were shown, with respect and reverence, her portrait hanging upon the wall of the salon—that pleasing, youthful portrait by La Tour, in which the divine Emilie, richly and trimly dressed, looks at us with a kind of arch thoughtfulness, her books, papers and globe at her side.

We know nothing of the fate of that unfortunate little daughter who, by coming into the world, so tragically ended her mother's life. Madame du Châtelet's son was guillotined in 1794. As for Saint-Lambert, his wretched intrigue gave him a certain prestige in the world of fashion. He became a friend of the Encyclopaedists, and wrote poems which were considered in their time, and by Voltaire himself, to be very good poems.

Voltaire's tragedy of *Orestes* was first played on the 12th of January, 1750. It had been written as a counter-blast to the *Electra* of Crébillon, and with the avowed purpose of vexing and defeating a rival. Such a purpose was no commendation. Crébillon, as the royal censor, had passed *Orestes* without any demands, and had returned the manuscript with a simple and dignified little speech : " Sir, I have been content with the success of *Electra ;* I hope the brother will do you as much honour as the sister has done me." Knowing in what

circumstances and with what aim the tragedy had been composed, the public was not prepared to give it a cordial reception. Ancient Crébillon, a placid, courteous and worthy old man, had many friends. Voltaire, in accordance with his custom, had organised a formidable body of supporters who, with noisy approbation, were to cry down the others and prove the merit of *Orestes*. He did more. At the first performance, watching with equal anxiety the progress of the play and the behaviour of his partisans, he sprang up suddenly in his box and shouted, with a crazy gesture : " Courage, ye brave Athenians—'tis Sophocles ! " That was bad enough, but worse was to follow.

One night, while the brave Athenians were dutifully clapping, he saw a little man with a muff. The little man was clearly not of the Athenian party : there he stood, the nasty provoking creature! with both hands in his wretched muff : a silent insult. " Who are *you*, sir ! " cried the furious poet.—" Rousseau."—Disastrous name ! " *What* Rousseau ? " Not Jean-Baptiste or Jean-Jacques, this man with a muff, but some obscure person, known only as *dramatic author*. But he answered Voltaire, as he deserved to be answered, tartly enough. The foolish and humiliating scene ended by Voltaire's hurried retirement, not without angry words and angry glances from all parts of the theatre.

More and more occupied with the stage, Voltaire patronised young Lekain, who was to become a great actor, and fitted up a private theatre in his own house. Here, following a successful performance of *Mahomet*, the new *Catiline* was produced before a fashionable and carefully chosen audience. For this production, de Richelieu obtained from the Comédie the very scenery

and properties which had been used in Crébillon's play. The new *Catiline* was acclaimed with fervour ; Voltaire was in transports of delight ; and the memory of Cicero (so he said) was avenged.

This pleasing though private triumph was followed soon by another. *Alzire* was performed by noble amateurs at Versailles, with Madame de Pompadour playing the chief part. The first performance was on the 28th of February, and it was repeated on the 2nd of March. On the latter occasion, Voltaire was present. He had the satisfaction of seeing *Alzire* splendidly played by Madame de Pompadour, more beautiful than ever, and the less obvious satisfaction of hearing the king declare " it was astonishing that the author of *Alzire* was the same who had written *Orestes*."

It was now that a new enemy, and one by no means contemptible, made his appearance. Fréron, at that time (1750) a young man of thirty-one, was a journalist with ability superior to that of the ordinary kind. He was a critic, also, of no ordinary kind ; for he was not wholly devoid of judgment, and could himself write in a style which was vigorous, elegant and well directed. He was led into the way of journalism by Desfontaines, and soon acquired the methods of that amiable master. In his periodical *Letters* he attacked Voltaire with acidulous humour. To attack Voltaire was a sure way of becoming known, for the great man, by crying out, invariably drew attention to his assailant.

But Fréron was hateful to Voltaire for more than one reason. Fréron had written a Fontenoy ode which had been compared, in a way not wholly pleasing, with that of the royal historiographer. And Fréron had been recommended as a correspondent to Frederick. Voltaire, by sending a villainous portrait of Fréron to Potsdam,

had easily quashed the recommendation ; but the mischief was done. Twice, in March 1750, Voltaire wrote to Berrier, Lieutenant-General of Police, begging his protection against the libels of Fréron and his associate, La Porte.

" It is deplorable, that, at my age, surrounded by a numerous family of magistrates and officers, and myself an officer of the king's household, I should be exposed continually to the insolence of these paper-smudgers. One is not allowed to speak for oneself. I do but ask of you, Sir, and I beg you in the name of all honest men, to have the goodness to order Fréron to have a word with you, and to command him to be more circumspect. He lives in the house of a distiller, Rue de Seine. You, Sir, may put an end to this scandal with one word."

Persecuted, or believing himself to be so, surrounded by vexations, feeling the indifference or hostility of the public, out of favour at court, and with no companion to share his life and his troubles, Voltaire now turned readily and hopefully towards Frederick. At Potsdam, with Solomon of the North and his charming family, he would be praised and petted and treated as a great man, a great poet, historian, philosopher. He would escape from the silly importunities of his pretended friends, the chatter of Mignot Denis, and the wickedness of the pamphleteers and journalists. He would escape, too, from the expense and worry of costly entertainment. Once more he would be avenged on the cruel injustice of his countrymen ; he would be the prime favourite of a powerful king. Who could hesitate between Louis and Frederick ? He would have but one regret—separation from his " dear angels," the Count and Countess d'Argental.

In April, the young poet Baculard d'Arnaud had left Paris to join the group of illustrious or singular men who were assembling at Berlin. He had gone with Voltaire's blessing, with verses and letters for his patron, and Voltaire was now making ready to follow his lead.

"Here," wrote Frederick in his most insinuating manner, "is a little community raising altars to the *invisible god*; but have a care, for *hereticks* will certainly raise altars to *Baal*, if our *God* does not show himself soon. I will say no more."

The god was quite willing to move to his new quarters, but money had to be advanced. "I have set up house, as they say in Paris, and live like a philosopher with family and friends. . . . In spite of that, 'tis impossible for me to incur any expenses out of the ordinary: first, because it has cost me a great deal to establish my little household; secondly, because the affairs of Madame du Châtelet, involv'd with my own, have cost me even more. . . . I cannot procure a good travelling coach, nor start with the conveniences necessary for an invalid, nor provide for my household during my absence, etc., with less than 4,000 crowns from *Germany*." It was to be a loan, of course, payable on the liquidation of certain properties. Frederick sent flattering verses, and a bill of change.

Voltaire was now able to arrange quickly for his departure. On the 18th of June, with his coach and conveniences, he set out on the road to Berlin. On the 26th of June he wrote to d'Argental from Compiègne:

"Why am I here? why am I going yet further? why have I quitted you, my dear angels? You are not my guardians, for here am I deliver'd to the demon of journeys—*video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor.*"

But when, on the 10th of July, he reached Potsdam, there were no more regrets, and all was new, delightful, exciting.

"Here I am, at last, in Potsdam," he wrote to Madame Denis. "Under the late king, it was the place of *Pharasmanus*; a mere parade-ground with no garden at all; the only musick, the march of the *Guard* regiment; the only spectacles, reviews; and the *Army List* instead of a library. To-day, it is the palace of *Augustus*, of legions and men of spirit, of pleasure and glory, of magnificence and taste, etc."

Even the dear angels must hear of it, and he wrote to d'Argental:

"Behold me here, in this place, once so barbarous, to-day as much grac'd by the arts as dignified by glory. An hundred and fifty thousand victorious troops, no procurers, comedy, philosophy, poetry, a hero both philosopher and poet, grandeur and graces, grenadiers and Muses, trumpets and fiddles, Platonick festivals, society and liberty! Who would believe it? Yet 'tis all true; and all that is not more precious to me than our little suppers."

With rising enthusiasm, he wrote, some days later, to de Thibouville:

"What would you that I should do? To find all the charms of society in a king who has won five battles; to be surrounded by *drums*, and yet to hear the lyre of *Apollo*; to enjoy delicious conversation, at four hundred leagues from Paris; to spend one's days, partly in celebrations, partly in the delights of a tranquil and busy

life, sometimes with *Frederick the Great*, sometimes with *Maupertuis*—all that takes the mind from mere *tragedies*."

And so, for many days, letters were filled with accounts of carnivals, banquets, plays, operas, balls, gaiety, and the rare pleasures of intercourse with a brilliant, unique society of wits and scholars, genially patronised (or so it seemed) by the wonderful king. The god was on his appointed throne ; no talk of heretics or Baal. Here was distraction, and the appearance, at least, of happiness.

But the two most remarkable and most disagreeable men in Europe could not live long together in harmony.

CHAPTER VI

FREDERICK THE GREAT

THE fame of a soldier looks uncommonly as if it depends more upon luck than anything else. It certainly does not depend upon qualities of a moral or intellectual kind, although the most noteworthy performances of soldiers are not infrequently the clever apologies which they compose in times of peace or retirement. Men who have been termed great because of their military achievements might equally well have been termed fortunate, brave, obstinate, or simply well-disciplined.

Frederick was more than a mere commander. He played with ease and proficiency upon one of the most difficult of wind instruments—the flute, or *flauto traverso*. He wrote copiously, with vigour if not with elegance. He desired to surround himself with men of learning, and to establish in Berlin a famous academy of letters, philosophy and science. Such a desire may have sprung from a ruler's vanity, but it was not the vanity of the ordinary ruler, who would have thought far more of surrounding himself with guns and grenadiers. The nature of his mind was harsh, cold and cynical ; his conduct was often that of a cruel buffoon, and his policy evasive and treacherous. Yet it would be incorrect to say that he had no sense of public responsibility. He had an austere and formal concept of his duty to the State, which, however grey and cheerless it may have been, served him well enough, and served the State well enough, as a substitute for principles of a more generous and humane origin. Frederick wished to build up a strong, secure and " respectable " Prussia,

without unnecessary hesitation in the choice of means and methods. He wished, also, to govern justly; not so much because a just government would be good for the "damned race" of his Prussians, but rather because it would mark him as a man of intelligence and a ruler of distinguished character, and because he saw it to be a thing clearly desirable for its own sake. Here, in the skill and firmness of his later administration, and not in the noisy victories of Mollwitz or Rossbach, he could base a claim to greatness. If he had not been a king, Frederick might have been known only as an eccentric man with ability in music, a few scraps of learning and philosophy, an ugly wit, and extremely disagreeable manners.

In 1750, he had chosen, for his familiars, a number of curiously assorted men.

There was Algarotti, the ladies' Newtonian, a sly, courtly, amusing fellow, who, like Fontenelle, made science an elegant pastime. In 1736 Algarotti had stayed at Cirey with Émilie and Voltaire, and had shared, or guided, the studies of the two philosophers. Algarotti was a fop and a poetaster, discreetly frivolous, always amiable, with all the subtlety and charm of a true Venetian. He had need of subtlety in that little group, where jealousy was never asleep and spite was quick to take revenge. He was born in the same year as Frederick, and in 1750 he was thirty-eight.

By way of contrast to this graceful Italian, there was La Mettrie—a man who might well have figured in the *Midnight Conversation* of Hogarth. La Mettrie was an atheist physician, a roystering, jovial, noisy creature, perfectly unrestrained in speech and manners, treating all serious respectable things with a rude, hilarious mockery. Not lacking wit or invention, he

had written the *Man-machine*, and two or three clever satires. It was usual enough, at Frederick's intimate supper-parties, to see this Hogarthian figure, with loose cravat, unbuttoned waistcoat, a napkin tied round his bald shining head—perruque flung on the floor. No one could match La Mettrie in bold extravagance of talk, or in the licence, vigour and crudity of his jesting. He was entirely without shame or reserve, unseemly and slovenly, greedy and drunken, but liked by Frederick for his profuse, energetic humour. In his profession, he was by no means unlearned. He had translated the *Aphrodisiacus* and had written a *Treatise upon the Vertigo*.

D'Argens, another favourite, was very different from La Mettrie. He was a polished man of letters, weak and vain, the hero of many comic adventures, with a rare gift of conversation. Frederick made him one of his chamberlains, and treated him with cordial familiarity.

Of the fiery Chasot, a cavalry major, little need be said. Chasot, like his royal patron, had a passion for the flute. He practised upon this instrument so often, and with such obstinacy and powerful blowing, that his neighbours wished him at the devil. He served in the Bayreuth regiment, but spent much of his time at the court.

Darget, the king's reader, and Professor Maupertuis, the head of the Berlin Academy, figured less frequently at the supper-parties.

It is odd that the official representative of France, at this court where Frenchmen were so much in evidence, should have been an Irish refugee. Lord Tyrconnel, a great, raw Irishman, bluff, cynical, an epicure of the brutish kind, appeared to Voltaire as " a worthy English-

man," with a " sharp and caustic tongue," and " something frank, which is peculiarly English, and which men of his profession so often lack." What was Tyrconnel's profession ? Heaven knows ; and heaven knows why Voltaire should have considered him a worthy man, or found in him an assemblage of English virtues. It may have been with an ironical intention that Frederick, at whose court France was thus represented by an Irishman, sent as his envoy to the French court a Scottish Jacobite, George Keith. At the time of Voltaire's arrival, George Keith and his brother were both in residence at Potsdam.

In this group of imported favourites, we find only one German who was on the same footing of intimacy. The Baron Pollnitz, an elderly courtier, supple and insincere, could amuse Frederick by his gossip, and could bear Frederick's unpardonable insults. He was anything but worthy ; but worthiness was not a quality which Frederick insisted upon in his companions.

Voltaire might have imagined himself in a French court, had it not been for the grim battalions, the ordered regularity of the king's life, and the general heaviness of style which marks the Teutonic affectation of gaiety and elegance. The inner circle of the court was formed almost entirely of his own countrymen : d'Argens, Maupertuis, Chasot, Baculard d'Arnaud, La Mettrie, Darget—and now Voltaire himself had joined the group. Frederick set the fashion, and Frederick talked and wrote in French. Everything was done, or attempted, in the French manner. " I'll admit the Prussian *tragedies* are no better than ours ; but you would be put to it to celebrate Madam the Dauphine's confinement by a spectacle as noble and as gallant as the one being got ready at *Berlin*." So Voltaire wrote

to d'Argental ; and he spoke with delight of the "unspeakable goodness of the victor of *Silesia*, who bears the whole burden of a king from five in the morning till dinner-time, who gives all the rest of the day to elegant letters, who condescends to work with me for three hours together, who submits his great genius to the critick, and who, at supper, is the most amiable of men, the charm and bond of the whole society."

In August, Frederick conferred the rank of chamberlain upon Voltaire, and gave him a golden chain to wear round his neck, a golden key to dangle over his waistcoat, and a pension of 20,000 francs. He offered to Madame Denis a pension of 4,000 for life if she would come to Berlin and keep house for her uncle. Madame Denis preferred to be mistress of the house in the Rue Traversière.

Voltaire's proper and appointed work at Potsdam was the correction of Frederick's verse and prose. On this subject he wrote to d'Argental :

"He has more imagination than I, but I have more method. I profit by the confidence he has in me by telling him the truth more boldly than I would tell it to Marmontel, to d'Arnaud, or to my niece. He does not send me to the mines because I criticize his verses ; he thanks me, he corrects them, and always with improvement. He has wrote some which are admirable. His prose equals his verse, at least ; but here he goes too quickly. There were some good courtiers who told him that all was perfect ; but what is perfect, is that he believes me rather than his flatterers—he loves, he perceives the truth. We must not say *Caesar est supra grammaticam*. Caesar wrote as he fought. Frederick

plays upon the flute like *Blavet* ; why should he not write like our best authours ? This occupation is worth more than gaming or hunting. His *History of Brandenburg* will be a master-piece when he has revised it with care ; but has a king the time for such cares ? a king who, alone, governs a vast monarchy ?—aye ; 'tis this confounds me ; I am in a perpetual surprize. And you must know, moreover, that he is the best of men—or I am the most foolish. Philosophy has made his character even more perfect. He has corrected himself, as he corrects his works."

This, in view of what is to follow, is curious reading. He has more imagination than I ! His *Brandenburg* will be a masterpiece ! What did he mean ? Voltaire's attitude had changed considerably when, a few months later, he spoke both of prose and of verse as " the King of Prussia's dirty linen." At the same time, it is just to remember that, when he wrote his short *Memoirs* at Les Délices in 1759, he said : " I gave him all my reasons in writing, and thus compos'd a manual of rhetorick and poetry for his use ; he made good use of it, and his genius served him even better than my lessons."

So, for a time, life was gay enough, and full of promise. There were torchlight tournaments, with quadrilles of Romans, Greeks, Carthaginians and Persians, led by four royal princes. There were splendid fireworks, grand operas. A little theatre, built under the direction of Voltaire himself, was fitted up in the apartments of the Princess Amelia, and here *Catiline or Rome Sav'd* was performed, with Voltaire in the part of Cicero. Then came a period of tranquillity in the agreeable retreat of Sans-Souci, Frederick's baroque pleasure-

house at Potsdam, and Voltaire was able to work quietly on his *Age of Louis XIV*. Many of his most delightful letters were now written for Madame Denis, and to her he sent the following account of his life in October :

" Here we are in the Potsdam retreat ; the tumult of fêtes has ended, and my spirit is not a little reliev'd. I am not sorry to find myself with a king who has neither court nor council. It is true that Potsdam is inhabited by the moustachios and bearskins of grenadiers ; but, thank God, I see nothing of them. I work quietly in my apartment, to the sound of the drum. I have withdrawn from the king's dinners : there are too many generals and princes. I cannot accustom myself to be always on a ceremonial footing with the king, and to talk in publick. I sup with him, in a smaller company. The supper is shorter, gayer and more natural. I would die of grief and indigestion at the end of three months, if I had to dine every day publickly with a king."

About a month later, he wrote, also to Madame Denis, one of the happiest and gayest of his letters :

" So, my dear child, they know already in Paris that we have played at Potsdam the *Death of Caesar*, that Prince *Henry* is a good actor, has an accent, and is mighty amiable, and that we are enjoying ourselves here ? All that is true ; . . . but . . . the supper-parties of the king are delicious ; we talk reason, wit, science ; liberty reigns ; he is the soul of it all ; no ill humour, no clouds—at least, no storms. My life is free, industrious ; but . . . but . . . operas, comedies, tourneys, suppers at *Sans-Souci*, exercizing of the army, concerts, studies, readings ; but . . . but . . . the city

of Berlin, grand, far more spacious than Paris, palace, theatres, affable queens, charming princesses, stately and handsome ladies-in-waiting, Madame Tyrconnel's house always full, and often too much so ; . . . but . . . but, my dear child, the season grows plaguey cold.

" I am in the humour for buts, and I will say : But it is impossible that I should start before the 15th of December. You cannot doubt that I am burning with anxiety to see you, to embrace you, to speak to you. My mad wish to see Italy does not approach the sentiments which call me to you ; but, my child, allow me yet a month ; beg this grace for me from M. d'Argental : for I say always to the King of Prussia that, although I am his chamberlain, I belong none the less to you and to M. d'Argental. But is it true that our *Isaac* d'Argens has gone to shut himself up at Monaco with his wife, who is a great *virtuoso* ? Therein is a grain of madness or a large dose of philosophy. He would do well to come here to join our colony.

" Maupertuis is a little unhing'd just now ; he takes my measure severely with his quadrant. They say there's a shade of jealousy in his problems. There is here, by way of compensation, a fellow who is too gay by far : 'tis La Mettrie. His ideas are like fireworks: all squibs and rockets. This hullabaloo is amusing for a quarter of an hour, but mortally wearisome at last. Without knowing it, he has just had a wicked book printed at Potsdam, in which he proscribes virtue and remorse, sings in praise of vice, invites the reader to every dissipation—and all without evil designs. In this book there are a thousand bright flashes, and not half a page of reason ; lightnings in darkness. Sensible folk have took on themselves to point out to him the enormity of his teaching. He has been quite astonished;

he knew not what he had written ; to-morrow he would write the contrary, if he was ask'd to. God forbid that I should make him my physician !—he would give me a blue sublimate in place of rhubarb, very innocently, and would then die of laughing. This odd physician is one of the king's readers ; and the best of it is, he is now reading to him the *History of the Church*. There are hundreds of pages, and there are certain passages where the king and his reader are like to choke with merriment.

" Farewell, my dear child. They wish to play *Rome Sav'd* in Paris ? but . . . but . . . Farewell ; I embrace you with all my heart."

Voltaire had no intention of returning to Paris. He was having it all his own way. He had a quarrel with Baculard d'Arnaud, and Baculard was quickly dismissed by Frederick. The tragedy of *Zaïre* was being rehearsed by royal amateurs.

He had all the delight of being a courtier, with none of the apprehensions or duties of the ordinary life at court. He had ample leisure for his own work. He was exchanging gay letters with the Margrave of Bayreuth. Frederick was more than amiable ; the suppers were glorious ; even the flute could be endured cheerfully. The world was good enough, and Potsdam the best place in the world, and Frederick the best of kings and kindest of men.

On the 5th of January, 1751, *Zaïre* was played at Potsdam, and " brother Voltaire " wrote an account of it to " sister Guillemette," the margrave. " Prince Henry surpassed himself. The Prince Royal spoke his words very clearly. Prince Ferdinand modulated his voice. The Princess Amelia had sensibility, and the Queen-Mother was enchanted." And there is a note

on the same performance in a letter to Madame Denis: "The Princess Amelia was Zaïre, and I was the good Lusignan. Our princess plays Hermione much better —it is, moreover, a better part. Madame Tyrconnel acquitted herself well enough as Andromache. There are not many actresses with such fine eyes."

Then came the dreadful affair of the Jew Hirsch, and the black storm of Frederick's displeasure.

The affair of the Jew is so involved, so complicated by ingenious lying, that we can do no more than give its bare outline.—During the wars, the *Steuer* or State Bank of Saxony had issued a large series of notes which had rapidly depreciated in the foreign exchanges. By the treaty of Dresden, in 1745, Frederick had stipulated that these notes, if presented at the *Steuer* by his own subjects, were to be honoured at their full value. As a result of this, depreciated notes were bought up in Holland and other places, and then cashed at the *Steuer*. In 1748 the importation of the notes was prohibited, but the practice continued.

A speculation in these depreciated notes had an irresistible attraction for Voltaire, and he did not consider the treachery, danger and dishonesty of such a proceeding. Having learnt that the notes could be bought in Dresden at 35 per cent. below par, he commissioned the Jew Hirsch to acquire them in large quantities. As a guarantee, he gave the Jew certain letters of change, and received from him, as surety on his part, a number of trinkets and diamonds. In settling accounts, the two conspirators fell out, and each roundly accused the other of being a rogue. Hirsch, indeed, accused Voltaire of having tampered with the agreement after it was signed—a charge which was not proved, and

was probably without foundation. But the shameful business was taken before the judges, before the Chancellor himself ; and although Voltaire won the case, he appeared hardly less blameable than the Jew.

No more suppers, no more delightful studies, no more dallying and flattery. It was all very well to pass it off as a joke, as he did in a letter to charming Wilhelmina the margrave :

" Brother Voltaire is doing penance ; he has had a devil of a business with a Jew, and according to the law of the *Old Testament* he must pay for having been robbed ; and what is more, a pretty hubbub has come of it, which, divided in three or four parts, would provide matter for a comedy as pleasant as the manifesto of the *Czarina*, who calls *Europe* to witness that M. *Gross* was not invited to supper."

The margrave, uneasy, wrote to her brother Frederick, and received a thundering reply :

" You have asked me about this business of Voltaire with a Jew. 'Tis the affair of a knave trying to deceive a pick-pocket. . . . Voltaire . . . has behaved like a madman. I am waiting until the affair is settled before I chastise him, and before seeing whether, at the age of fifty-six, one can make him, if not reasonable, at any rate less of a rogue."

On the 24th of February, the angry king (and he was justly angry) sent a crushing, unanswerable letter to the poet :

" I was pleased enough to receive you as my guest ; I esteemed your genius, your talents, your learning, and I had reason to think that a man of your age, tired of

brawling with authours and exposing himself to the tempest, had come here for refuge in a quiet haven ; but, first of all you exacted from me, in the most singular manner, that I should not engage Fréron to act as my correspondent. I had the weakness or the complaisance to give way to you here, although it was not for you to decide whom I should choose for my service. You had some little grievances against d'Arnaud ; a generous man would have forgiven him ; a vindictive man pursues the objects of his hatred. In short, although d'Arnaud had done nothing against me, it was for your sake that he was dismissed. You have been to the *Russian* minister, talking to him about matters in which you had no right to meddle, and it was thought I had ordered you to do so. You have meddled with the affairs of Madame de Bentinck, which were certainly no concern of yours. You have had the most disgraceful affair in the world with a Jew. You have behaved outrageously in the town. The affair of the Saxon notes is so well known in Saxony that I have received the most serious complaints from that State. For my part, I had kept peace in my house until your arrival ; and I warn you, that if you have a passion for scheming and plotting, you are come to the wrong place. I love men who are gentle and peaceable, whose conduct does not display the violent passions of tragedy : if you can resolve yourself to live as a philosopher, I shall be pleased to see you ; but if you abandon yourself to the impetuous fury of your passions, and fall foul of every one, you will not please me at all by coming here, and you may as well stay in Berlin."

To this letter Voltaire replied submissively, and with becoming airs of desolation and repentance. Frederick

was appeased, but he wrote back in a style which was plain, manly, and very much to the point :

" If you wish to come here, you are free to do so. I hear nothing of any lawsuit, not even of yours. Since you have gained it, I congratulate you, and I am truly glad that the affair is ended. I hope you'll have no further quarrels, either with the *Old* or the *New Testament* : such imbroglios tarnish honour, and, even with the talents of the rarest genius in *France*, you will not wipe out the stains with which conduct of this sort must eventually besmirch your reputation. A bookseller *Gosse* [Jore ?], an opera fiddler, a jeweller Jew—sure, these are names which ought not in any circumstances to be found associated with yours. I am writing this letter with the rough good sense of a *German*, who says what he thinks without using equivocal terms or sweetening phrases which disfigure the truth : 'tis for you to profit thereby."

Voltaire was back at Sans-Souci in March, and life went on, for a while, very much as it had before the shocking business of the notes, the Jew and the diamonds.

" Potsdam is more than ever a mixture of Sparta and Athens," he wrote to d'Argental. " Every day we have reviews and verses. We have Maupertuis and Algarotti. We work, and then sup gaily with a king who is a rare good companion. All that would be charming ;—but health ? Ah ! 'tis health, 'tis you that I miss, dear angel ! . . . My gentleman sets out every day, doubtless, at four o'clock ; my gentleman goes to the play, and brings with him to supper his placid joy and equable humour ; and I, such as I was, such as I am, holding my belly with both hands, and then my pen ; suffering,

working, supping, hoping for a morrow less tormented by the stomach-ache, and always deceived by the morrow. I tell you again : without these aches, without your absence, this land would be my paradise."

Voltaire's ill health, partly the result of a sedentary life, partly of his natural debility and a tightly strung nervous organisation, was constantly mentioned in his letters. Writing to his niece, Madame de Fontaine, in August, 1751, he spoke of it with unsparing frankness :

" As for me, after having tried hot water and cold water and every sort of good and bad regime, after having passed through the hands of cooks and quacks and doctors, after having been ill at Berlin last winter, I have took to supping, dining, and even breakfasting : they say that I am better, that I look younger. I know very well 'tis nothing of the kind ; but I have lived quietly for nigh six months together with my king, eating like a devil, and taking, as he does, a little powder'd rhubarb once every two days."

He was not the only one at Sans-Souci who had reason to complain of ill health. La Mettrie, with all his quips and jollity, Tyrconnel, with all his rude bluster, were both mortally sick. It was La Mettrie who brought to Voltaire the celebrated story of the orange-skin :

" This La Mettrie is a man of no consequence, who talks on familiar terms with the king, after his reading. He speaks to me with entire candour : he swears that, when he was talking with the king a few days ago, about my pretended favour and the little jealousies it excites, the king answered him : ' I shall need him for one more year, at the most : one squeezes the orange, and throws away the skin.' "

Was this true, or a stroke of malice on the part of La Mettrie? Probably it was true. La Mettrie had no ambitions, and Voltaire was fond of him. The poor doctor, jolly and careless as he seemed to be, had a desperate longing to see France again, and Voltaire had interceded for him with de Richelieu—apparently without success. The doctor was an undesirable.

La Mettrie died on the 11th of November, 1751. He had been summoned to attend Lord Tyrconnel, whose condition was deplorable, but who was eating, jesting and cursing like a Potsdam philosopher. He found Tyrconnel, with his lady and a large company, about to dine. La Mettrie joined the company. "He ate and drank, laughed and talked more than all the guests. When he was full to the very chin, they brought in a pie made of an eagle disguised as a pheasant, which had been sent from the North, well stuff'd with rancid fat, minced pork and ginger. Our good fellow ate the whole pie, and died next day in Lord Tyrconnel's house, attended by two physicians, of whom he had made rare sport. Here is a great epoch in the history of gluttons." So Voltaire described this edifying death to his niece.

There was a great dispute as to whether La Mettrie had died "like a Christian or like a doctor." He had begged Lord Tyrconnel that he might be buried in his garden. "The king had himself exactly informed of the manner in which he had died, whether he had observ'd all the Catholick forms, whether he had received any benefit from them: at last it was made clear that this *gourmand* had died a philosopher: *I am mighty glad of that*, said the king to us, *for the repose of his soul.* We fell a-laughing, and he also."

Thus, in the manner of the Potsdam epicures,

Frederick and his ribald crew made a mockery of the death of a boon companion. Yet Frederick wrote the elegy of this poor buffoon, and himself read it before the Academy of Berlin. The madness of La Mettrie, said Voltaire, must have been catching ; but a man who commands a hundred and fifty thousand men can do as he pleases.

Late in October, a very unpleasant young man of twenty-four had come to Berlin. His name was Laurent Angliviel de la Beaumelle. In 1747 he had entered the service of Baron de Gram at Copenhagen as tutor to his son. At Copenhagen, he had started a periodical —the *Danish Spectator* or *Modern Aspasia*—and in 1750, to his own astonishment, he was appointed to the chair of French Literature in the University. During the last year of his residence at Copenhagen (1751), this bumptious young man published a book which he called *My Thoughts* or *What would they say of it ?* In this book, after the manner of young men, he touched upon all things under the sun, and touched upon them with the beautiful assurance of immaturity. Voltaire, hearing that La Beaumelle had arrived, asked civilly for a copy of *My Thoughts*. La Beaumelle hesitated, as well he might.

On page seventy of this precious book there was the following passage : " If we read through all ancient and modern history, we shall find no instance of a *Prince* who gave a pension of seven thousand crowns to a man of letters, simply as a man of letters. There have been greater poets than *Voltaire* ; there have been none so well paid, for taste sets no limit to its rewards. The *King of Prussia* heaps benefits upon men of talents, for

precisely the same reasons which induce a little *German* prince to heap benefits upon a dwarf or buffoon." What would they say of it ?

The book was sent to Voltaire, who kept it for three days, and then returned it to the author with the corner of page seventy carefully turned down.

La Beaumelle, if he knew his man, had now cause for alarm ; but that did not prevent him from visiting Voltaire and appearing quite at his ease. Voltaire criticised *My Thoughts*, justly, though with a certain harshness, and then turned to the offending page. What was the meaning of it ?

The meaning of it, said the bumptious young author, was clear enough, surely. It meant that Voltaire was handsomely pensioned, as a man of his eminence deserved to be : the King of Prussia, unlike the little German princes who would have taken delight in buffoons, chose for his companions men of learning and genius. The sense was clear enough.

Perhaps it was, said Voltaire with one of his malicious grins ; but would it be so easy to persuade d'Argens, Professor Maupertuis, Baron Pollnitz and the Count Algarotti ? And Frederick himself had read the passage, and was very angry. Who showed it to him ? cried the bumptious one, forgetting himself : you promised to respect my confidence ! It was Darget, the king's reader. So the uneasy author, perhaps regretting his *Thoughts*, ran to Darget, and then ran to Maupertuis.

War between Voltaire and La Beaumelle was now declared, and each waited for the opportunity to strike a telling blow. That opportunity presented itself to La Beaumelle in the publication of *Louis XIV*.

In March, 1752, Voltaire sent some copies of *Louis*

XIV, and probably of other books, to his friend Falkener, to whom he wrote in English :

" My dear and beneficent friend, I send to you, by the way of Hamburgh, two enormous bales of the scribbling trade. I direct them to our envoy at Hamburgh, who will dispatch them to you, and put my wares to sea, instead of throwing them into the fire ; which might be the case in France or at Rome.

" My dear friend, I have recourse to your free and generous soul. Some French good patriots, who have read the book, raise a noble clamour against me, for having praised Marlborough and Eugène ; and some good churchmen damn me for having turned a little into ridicule our *jansénisme* and *molinisme*.

" If our prejudiced people are fools, booksellers and printers or book-jobbers are rogues. I am like to be damned in France, and cheated by the Dutch ; the old German honesty is gone."

Falkener was to arrange for the sale of some of the copies, and to give others to his friends: " Burn the book, in case you should yawn in reading it ; but do not forget your old friend, who will be attached to you till the day of his doom."

But while La Beaumelle was preparing his attack on *Louis XIV*, a more serious quarrel began. This quarrel, which is in itself one of the most curious episodes in the history of literature, was the outcome of a growing enmity between Voltaire and Maupertuis.

The causes of that enmity are not obscure. In every distinguished man, Voltaire saw a possible rival. Maupertuis, however vain or eccentric he may have been, was a man of extraordinary achievement, of wide

learning and of striking character. Few men of his day had a more profound knowledge of the natural sciences, and fewer still had the courage, as he had, to lead scientific expeditions in search of the North Pole or to brave the dangers and annoyances of life in the tropics. In 1752 he was fifty-four: suffering in health, irritable, morbidly vain, giving himself strange airs and wearing strange clothes, attracting a good deal of notice, and highly esteemed by Frederick. That was enough to make Voltaire dislike him, in spite of his old friendship; but dislike ripened quickly to a blazing hatred.

Maupertuis, though he had been Voltaire's friend for many years, had made it clear to the poet that he had no business to meddle in matters of science, in physics or in mathematics. His attitude to Voltaire had always been a trifle patronising. Maupertuis—whose portrait shows him gravely and firmly patting and flattening the North Pole with his plump hand—was a great leader of human progress, and Voltaire was just an amusing fellow, whose plays and histories were good enough, but whose physics were only those of an amateur. So, too, when he taught the divine Emilie or smiled condescendingly over her work, his attitude was always that of a master, and he had no willingness to admit her genius. And when Emilie favoured the Leibnitzian Koenig, Maupertuis took no pains to conceal his coldness and displeasure.

There is no doubt that Voltaire was jealous of his countryman's renown at Potsdam, and was eagerly watching for some weakness, some gesture of unguarded vanity, which would give him a chance of opening fire. It was Koenig who provided the chance.

Maupertuis hated Koenig, who had once addressed him as " my poor friend,"—" but my poor friend, you

must remember. . . ." Yet they had formerly been friends ; and Koenig, a plain good-natured Swiss, had a great admiration for the attainments of Maupertuis.

But Koenig disagreed with the Professor on the subject of the *least quantity of action* (an early form of our quantum theory) and its effects upon *hard or elastic bodies*. This principle, which had the immense advantage of being reconcilable with the idea of a Supreme Being, for reasons which are not altogether plain, was published in 1749 in the *History of the Academy*. It was opposed by Koenig, who had previously shown his manuscript to the Professor, in the *Nova Acta Eruditorum* of March, 1751. In this reply, a letter from Leibnitz was quoted, showing that Leibnitz himself had already examined the *principle of action*.

Upon this, Maupertuis, crazy with a rage in which there were evident symptoms of mental disorder, declared that the alleged letter of Leibnitz was a forgery or invention. He convened a tribunal of his academicians, who confirmed this dreadful accusation, and stated, on the authority of Euler, that no such letter could ever have been written by Leibnitz. This decision was made known on the 13th of April, 1752.

Soon parties were engaged on both sides, the papers were full of skits and libels, and the pamphleteers were busy.

Voltaire did not immediately enter the field. He watched events with a prudence more ominous for Maupertuis than his usual sudden attack. On the 23rd of May, he wrote to Madame Denis:

"This world is an huge Temple of Discord—our Berlin *Academy* is a chapel given over entirely to the protection of this *Goddess*. Maupertuis has just com-

mitted a little act of tyranny there which is unworthy of a philosopher. By his personal authority, he has denounced as a forger, in convocation, one of the Academy's members—Koenig, a great geometrician, librarian to the Princess of *Orange*, and Professor in Publick Law at the Hague. This Koenig is a man of merit, who is quite incapable of being a forger. I lived for near two years with him in the house of Madame du Châtelet. . . . He is not the man to suffer such an affront.

"I am not yet fully inform'd of the details of this newly begun War. I do not leave Potsdam. Maupertuis is in Berlin, sick through too much drinking of brandy . . . but he deals me a good many glov'd blows, and I am afraid he may do me even more harm than he has done to Koenig. A false account, a timely word, circulated, whisper'd in the king's ear, and which sticks in his memory, is a weapon against which there is often no shield. D'Argens has not done so ill to seek the shores of the Mediterranean; I should do even better to seek those of the Seine."

Koenig, who could produce no original, stoutly maintained that his transcription from Leibnitz was from an authentic copy, and late in September he published his *Appeal to the Publick*, a formidable denunciation of Maupertuis, of his Academy, and of his procedure. A few days before the issue of this *Appeal*, Voltaire had opened his campaign with a little pamphlet entitled *The Reply of an Academician of Berlin to an Academician of Paris*, a short but horribly concise account of the Koenig affair. Although the *Reply* was merely a statement of the case against the Academy and the President, its concentration, its grim, condensed energy, left no doubt as to the author.

The reputation of Maupertuis was in grave danger, and Koenig, if not completely vindicated, was able to take up a more aggressive posture. He had secured, on his side, the most redoubtable pen in Europe, and had reason to feel encouragement. Voltaire was now greatly occupied with the controversy, and he was presently given an opening which enabled him to crush Maupertuis beneath an overwhelming satire. On the 1st of October, he wrote to Madame Denis :

" I send you bravely Koenig's *Appeal to the Publick*. You will read the history of the proceedings with interest. The work is extremely well compos'd : innocence and reason are victorious. *Paris* will think as *Germany* and *Holland*. Maupertuis is here look'd on as a ridiculous tyrant ; but I fear lest his atrocious behaviour should have tragick results.

" He has conducted himself in this affair as a man more skilled in intrigue than in geometry ; he has secretly irritated the *King of Prussia* against Koenig, and has cunningly availed himself of his authority to cause a search for the original letters of Leibnitz in a place where he knew well they could not be found ; by this unworthy manoeuvre he has involved the King in his own schemes. Would you believe, that the King, instead of feeling anger, as he should, at being thus deceived and compromised, hath taken the part of this tyrant philosopher with zeal ? He will not even read Koenig's reply. No one can open his eyes when he has determined to shut them. Once calumny has entered the mind of a king, 'tis like the gout in a bishop—there's no shifting it.

" Maupertuis, in the midst of these quarrels, has gone quite mad. You will remember that he was chained

up at Montpellier, some twenty years ago, in one of these fits. His malady has fallen upon him with violence. He has just printed a book in which he pretends that the existence of God can only be prov'd by an algebraick *formula* ; that any man can predict the future if he does but exalt his soul ; that we should go to *Patagonia* and dissect the heads of giants if we would discover the nature of the human understanding. The whole book is in this style. He has read it to his Berlin ladies, who find it admirable."

Here was the opening. Maupertuis had played into the hands of his enemy in a manner which filled the enemy with fierce delight and with unfeigned amazement. *Quem Deus vult perdere*—never had there been such a case in point ; never had a man chosen so well the method and moment of his own destruction.

The President, broken in health, agitated by the bitterness and violence of the quarrel, drinking many glasses of brandy, and thinking that the time had come for a splendid revelation of his genius, composed and printed an extraordinary volume of *Letters*. It was even as Voltaire had said, and worse. The soul was to be discovered through experiments on the large and living heads of Patagonians ; people were to be smeared with resin so that they might live for ever ; a shaft was to be driven to the centre of the earth, for the advancement of learning ; one of the pyramids was to be blown up, in order that the Academy might know precisely what was beneath it ; a town was to be built, in which every one was to speak Latin, by which means the use and knowledge of that tongue would be prodigiously extended ; criminals were to be dissected alive, in hope of observing the elusive operations of the soul

—and so forth. To attack all this—the disordered ramblings of a man who was more than a little mad—was easy enough. It was a perfect opportunity. Into this enormous gap in the enemy's line Voltaire could pour the whole of his forces, and he did not hesitate to do so.

But Frederick, in the meantime, had come to the assistance of his tottering President and the sadly maligned Academy. Frederick himself wrote and circulated *The Letter of an Academician of Berlin*, a pamphlet with the royal arms on the title, in which he defended the virtuous Maupertuis and his colleagues, and attacked the wicked men who spoke against them. From the most wicked of these men there came a cry of anger and amazement:

"Here is a thing unknown indeed," he wrote to Madame Denis; "a thing which will not be copied; 'tis unique. The *King of Prussia*, without having read one word of Koenig's reply, without hearing, without consulting any one, has just printed a pamphlet against Koenig, against me, against all those who have wished to prove the innocence of this professor who was so cruelly condemned. He treats all his partisans as jealous, foolish or dishonest men. . . . The German scribblers, who could not believe that a king who has won battles could be the authour of such a work, have spoke of it freely as the essay of a schoolboy who knows nothing at all of the matter. But the pamphlet has been reprinted in Berlin, with the Prussian eagle, a crown and a sceptre below the title. The crown, eagle and sceptre are very much surpriz'd to find themselves in such a place. Every one shrugs his shoulders, lowers his eyes, and dares say nothing. . . . And

what is most rare in this cruel and absurd business, is that the king has no liking at all for Maupertuis, in whose favour he employs his pen and his sceptre. *Plato* thought to die of grief at not being ask'd to certain little suppers when I was present, and the King has told us an hundred times that the savage vanity of this *Plato* makes him unsociable. . . . But this is only but a part of what has happen'd. Unfortunately, I find myself writing too, and on the other side. I have no sceptre, but I have a pen; and in some way, I know not how, I have cut this pen in such a fashion as to make ridiculous this *Plato*, with his giants, his predictions and dissections, and his impertinent quarrel with Koenig. The raillery is innocent ; but I knew not then that I was aiming a shot at the king's fancy. 'Tis an unlucky business. I have provok'd self-love and despotick power, two very dangerous things. . . . As for myself, I am sorely afflicted and very ill, and to crown all, I sup with the king. 'Tis the banquet of *Damocles*."

Voltaire's "innocent raillery" was the famous *Diatribe of Doctor Akakia, Physician to the Pope*. In order to publish this, he deceived Frederick. He obtained leave to print certain articles on religious questions, including the *Defence of Lord Bolingbroke*, and then, by virtue of this leave, he published the awful *Diatribe*.

Doctor Akakia is perhaps the cruellest and most diverting satire in the world. It is, however, an occasional piece, and the force of the satire cannot be relished without an understanding of the quarrels and controversies which produced it. The outline of those controversies has been presented to the reader; and we need not examine the written follies of poor

Maupertuis. But before we laugh at the furious fun of the *Diatribe*, we should remember, once again, that Maupertuis was not a contemptible man, that he had been one of the great discoverers of his age, that he was now sick, mentally disordered, and in a state more proper to excite pity than malice or ridicule. His deplorable action in the affair of Koenig was due to the injured pride of a man who was half crazy ; and the unlucky *Letters* (which he himself admitted to be "without order") were vagaries of a kind which a generous public would have quickly forgotten. We do not judge great men by the products of their decay or dotage. Maupertuis, if not a great man, was one of extraordinary accomplishment, and in more than one respect superior to his terrible enemy.

The methods of *Doctor Akakia* are direct and devastating. The *Letters*, he says, cannot really be the work of the grave President ; they are written by some impudent young fellow, who, stealing the name of an illustrious man, has tried to sell his own extravagances. "This great man [Maupertuis], so incapable of charlatanism, would never have given to the publick letters which are not address'd to any one, and would certainly never have fallen into certain little errours which are only pardonable in a youth." After an absurd *Decree of the Inquisition of Rome*, and a more absurd *Judgement of the Professors of the College of Sapience*, the wicked author proceeds to *An Examination of the Letters of a Young Authour disguis'd under the Name of a President*. In this *Examination* occur the following passages of ferocious gaiety :

"We pass over several things which would fatigue the patience of the reader and the intelligence of Milord

the Inquisitor; but we think he would be mighty surprised to learn that the young student is positively anxious to dissect the heads of giants twelve feet high, and of hairy men with tails, so as to get to the bottom of the human understanding ; that with dreams and opium he regulates the soul ; that he creates eels big with other eels by means of fine flour, and fish with grains of wheat. We take this occasion for diverting Milord the Inquisitor.

" But Milord the Inquisitor will laugh no more when he shall see that every one may become a prophet; for the authour finds no more difficulty in seeing the future than in seeing the past. He vows that the reasons in favour of judicial astrology are as strong as the reasons against it. In short, he assures us that our perceptions of the past, of the present and of the future do but differ in the degree of the soul's activity. . . . We judge unanimously that his brain is prodigiously exalted, and that he will presently utter prophecies. We know not yet whether he will make big or little prophecies, but we are mightily afraid that he may be a prophet of evil, since, in his treatise on Happiness, he speaks only of affliction: he says, in particular, that all fools are unhappy. We present to all such our condolences ; but, if his exalted soul has seen the future, has she not beheld there something a little ridiculous ?

" He should also be assur'd that it will be difficult for him to make, as he pretends, a *hole* reaching to the very middle of the earth (wherein, it would seem, he desires to hide himself for shame at having put forward such things). To make this *hole*, we should have to dig up at least three or four hundred leagues of the country, which might perhaps disturb the system of the *balance* of Europe.

" In conclusion, we pray Doctor *Akakia* to prescribe him some cooling drink; we exhort him to study in some university, and to be modest."

After this comes the uproarious mockery of the *Memorable Séance*—three pages of the purest devilment. An extraordinary general meeting of learned men is convened at the Academy. Here the President, with all his apparatus and chosen examples, demonstrates the new discoveries. For example :

" In the first place, two physicians produced each one a sick man smeared with resinous wax, and two surgeons pricked the legs and arms of these sick men with long needles; whereupon the patients, who before were scarce able to move, began to cry and run about with all their strength ; and the *Secretary* noted this in the register. . . . Then all the workmen of the town presented themselves, for the purpose of quickly making a hole to reach the very centre of the earth, according to the special orders of the *President*. Even so far reach'd his vision ; but as the operation would have been somewhat lengthy, it was reserved for another time ; and the *Perpetual Secretary* arrang'd a meeting between the workmen and the builders of the tower of *Babel*.

" After that, the *President* ordered the preparation of a vessel for the dissection of giants and of hairy men with long tails in the *Southern* parts of the globe: he declared that he would himself undertake the voyage, and would go to breathe his native air; upon which the whole assembly clapped their hands. . . . The *President*, having toss'd off a glass of *rogum*, prov'd to the assembly that it was as easy for the soul to see the future as to see the past; and then he lick'd his

lips with his tongue, roll'd his head about, and prophesied. We do not relate the prophecy, which will be found entire in the *Almanack* of the Academy.

"The sitting was concluded by a very eloquent discourse spoken by the *Perpetual Secretary*: *'Tis only an Erasmus*, said he, *who could worthily sing your praises*; whereupon he raised the *monad* of the *President* to the very clouds, or at least to the very foggs. He set him boldly by the side of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. They made him a throne of bladders, and he set out next day for the *Moon*, where *Astolphus* (so it is said) found what the *President* had lost."

The publication of the *Diatribe* was not merely resented by Frederick; it made him furiously angry, and there was nothing unreasonable in his anger. He had been tricked by Voltaire, who had now crushed with ridicule the President of the Academy, whose crazy *Letters* had received Frederick's approbation. Desnoiresterres is probably right in refusing to believe the story about Voltaire and Frederick reading the satire together with explosions of merry laughter. Voltaire, seeing the gathering clouds, denied the work, and was promptly confounded by a signed statement from the printer.

"Your effrontery," wrote Frederick, "astounds me, after what you have done, which is clear as daylight. . . . Do not imagine that you will make us believe black is white. When one cannot see, 'tis because one has no mind to see; but if you persist in this affair, I will have everything printed; and folk will see that, if your work merits the erection of statues to honour you, your conduct is deserving of chains."

All the unsold copies of the *Diatribe* were seized and

publicly burnt in the open squares of Berlin on Christmas Eve. A particularly large pile was fired in the neighbourhood of the Taubenstrass, where Voltaire was lodging with M. de Francheville.

But Doctor Akakia had done his work. The burning of the book to ashes could not extinguish the impression which it had made, nor could the gift of the ashes to Maupertuis (a pretty gesture on the part of Frederick) heal the injured vanity of the President. It has been said that Maupertuis was literally killed by this dreadful squib and the other little writings of Akakia which were to follow it. He died at Bâle in 1759, completely broken in health and mind.

That any written satire could have such effects may well seem strange to a phlegmatic race whose cool heads and level humours protect them so mercifully against the darts of malice. But with Frenchmen of the eighteenth century it was very different. Satire is a peculiar gift of the Latin peoples, and a peculiar danger to their excitable nerves. We have seen how easily a play could be damned in eighteenth-century Paris by a little touch of wit at the right moment. Men were actually ruined by pamphlets, and ministers could be laughed out of office. Rousseau was driven crazy by persecution of this kind.

At the same time, it should be remembered that Maupertuis had been in ill health for a long while before the publication of the *Diatribe*. He had more than once shown signs of madness, and he was overstrained and overworked. This, however, does not exempt Voltaire from a serious charge ; for, if he did not hasten the death of Maupertuis, he was pursuing and tormenting a man who was already sick and discouraged, and who was unable to defend himself.

Shortly before the burning of Doctor Akakia, La Beaumelle had launched his attack on Voltaire. He published an unauthorised edition of *Louis XIV*, "augmented" by his own notes and comments. La Beaumelle had acquired, by questionable means, some questionable letters of Madame de Maintenon. In his "notes," he endeavoured to prove certain errors in Voltaire's history, and at the same time attacked Voltaire personally, as well as the members of the Potsdam circle. Voltaire sent a letter to Roques, an ecclesiastical councillor of Hesse-Homberg and a friend of La Beaumelle, and complained of the outrage.

The letter is of interest from more than one point of view. After stating his case against La Beaumelle, and accusing Maupertuis of having incited the young man to write against him, he says:

"I now find myself constrained to endure, at the same time, two most unhappy quarrels. I have to fight, both against Maupertuis, who seeks my destruction, and against La Beaumelle, whom he has employed to insult me. The life of a man of letters is a continual warfare, sometimes of a stealthy kind, and sometimes full of noise, as it is between princes; but we have an advantage which kings have not: between them, force is the arbiter, and with us 'tis reason. The publick is an incorruptible judge who, in time, makes known his irrevocable decrees. The publick will say whether I am wrong in taking the part of M. Koenig, cruelly oppressed as he is, and in refuting the lies with which La Beaumelle, incited by the oppressor of Koenig and of myself, has filled the *Age of Louis XIV*.

"La Beaumelle has told you, Sir, that he *will pursue me to Hell itself*. He is free to go there; and, in order

to merit this retirement, he tells you that he will print, at the end of *Louis XIV*, a lawsuit in which I was engaged, nearly three years ago, with a Jew, and which I won. I am ready to furnish him with all the papers, and he can bind them together, with the *Peace of Nimègue*, that of *Riswick*, and the *War of Succession* ; nothing would contribute more to the advance of the sciences."

Here is a charge against Maupertuis; and one which is altogether unfounded. It is true that Maupertuis was a gossip, and that he was jealous of Voltaire. But we know of nothing which leads us to suppose that he was planning Voltaire's destruction. The lawsuit with Hirsch the Jew had taken place less than two years previously, and not " nearly three years ago."

Frederick had now seen enough, and more than enough, of the dealings and trickeries of the great man. His patience was at an end. Frederick himself was capable of trickery, but he was not capable of mean evasions. His own faults were of a more manly character. His own mind was more disciplined; at least he knew how to restrain himself and how to act with decency, whatever his thoughts or designs. Probably he was less angered by Voltaire's audacity than he was by his cowering denials and foolish deceit. It was clear that Voltaire could not remain in Berlin for much longer, but the king and poet could still cajole each other with something of the old spirit and playfulness.

On New Year's Day, 1753, Voltaire handed back to the king his key, his cross and golden chain, and the last quarterly payment of his pension. Upon the envelope which contained these relics of favour he had written some touching verses, in which he likened himself to a sorrowing lover who returns the portrait

of his mistress. Frederick sent them all back again, with a coquettish note, inviting Voltaire to supper, and promising that all should be well.

Was he really anxious to forget and forgive, and to allow Voltaire another chance? Or was he afraid of him? Frederick's hundred and fifty thousand men could not defend him against the attacks of Doctor Akakia, or some other formidable personage.

It was Voltaire himself who decided to go.

"Sire," he wrote to Frederick, "urged by the tears and solicitations of my family, I find myself oblig'd to lay at your feet my destiny, and the benefits and distinctions with which you have honoured me. My sorrow equals my resignation. . . . I have lost all: there does but remain with me the memory of happy days spent in your retreat at Potsdam. I shall find any other solitude unhappy enough, doubtless. It is hard, moreover, to set forth at this season, oppress'd by sickness; but 'tis harder still to leave you. Believe me, 'tis the one grief I can feel at the present time."

Then, seeking for a more definite excuse, he pleaded ill health, and said that he had been ordered to take the waters at Plombières.

Yet, early in March (1753), Frederick was still on good terms with his poet; he could joke with him about the "grace of Beelzebub," and sent him quinquina when he had a cold. On the 16th of March, the tune had changed: Voltaire was told that he might leave when he pleased, that excuses were not necessary, that he was to return—finally—the golden key and the cross, and a book of "poesies" by Frederick himself.

Voltaire came to Potsdam on the 18th of March, and was installed, for the last time, in his old quarters at

Sans-Souci. The following afternoon, he spent two hours with the king in his private apartment.

Frederick was affable, amusing, ready to make jokes at the expense of poor Maupertuis, responding, as so often before, to the lively sallies or quick fancy of the poet. Voltaire (so it might have seemed) was never in higher favour. For six days he remained at Potsdam, petted and courted by Frederick, but always reminding the king of his wretched health, of his impatient "family," and of the necessity for a course of the waters at Plombières—he was, in fact, making arrangements for his departure.

On the morning of the 26th Frederick was on the parade-ground when he was told that Monsieur de Voltaire awaited his arders.

"So, Monsieur de Voltaire, you have really made up your mind to leave us?"

"Sire, urgent business affairs, and above all the state of my health, oblige me to."

"Then, Sir, I wish you a good journey."

And Frederick turned back to the stiff lines of his grenadiers.

Thus parted those two extraordinary men, who, in spite of their devilish humours, their hideous grimacing and treacherous designs, their grim coquetry and affectation, had always a fondness for each other. However indecently and heartily each might abuse the other behind his back (which is how we generally abuse each other), however fierce their mutual explosions of anger, there came, sooner or later, the desire to be reconciled. No one could amuse Frederick as Voltaire could amuse him; no one interested Voltaire more profoundly than Frederick, or possessed a mental complexion which more nearly resembled his own. For a while their intercourse

was broken, and those brusque words on the parade-ground were the last they ever spoke to each other. But, in little more than a year's time, they began to exchange letters again, and the correspondence was maintained for some four-and-twenty years, ending only with Voltaire's death in 1778.

Voltaire, travelling like a great gentleman, with roomy coach and heavy baggage, reached Leipsic the day after his departure from Potsdam. Here he wrote some more bitter and brilliant additions to the *Diatribe*, and had them printed.

Was there no end to this infernal malice? Doctor Akakia wrote a *Treaty of Peace between Monsieur the President and Monsieur the Professor*; and when poor Maupertuis, trembling with fear and anger, sent a note to the author and threatened him with "the most complete vengeance," the note itself was printed at the head of yet another page of savage jollity. "Since the late M. de *Pourceaugnac*, who wanted to draw his sword upon the doctors, there has never been such a naughty patient. Doctor *Akakia*, dreadfully frighten'd, had recourse to the University of Leipsic." And then came *The Letter of Dr Akakia to the Native of Saint-Malo*.

From Leipsic, Voltaire proceeded to Gotha, where he spent rather more than a month with the Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Gotha, handsomely entertained and making merry with a brave company. On the 26th of May he arrived at Cassel, intending to go thence to Strasburg. But now he learnt that Baron Pollnitz, the emissary of Frederick, was lying in wait for him. He was being pursued.

The reason for this was clear enough. In one of his innumerable packages, Voltaire had stowed away Frederick's book of *poesies*—a book which Frederick

was naturally anxious to get back at the earliest possible moment. Such royal *poesies*, in the hands of Dr Akakia, might be put to heaven knew what abominable usage. It was a terrifying thought. And Voltaire had no sooner reached the *Golden Lion* at Frankfort than he found himself arrested by the Baron Freytag, acting under instructions of the most explicit kind from Potsdam.

Now the package—"the great package"—with Frederick's book of verses, and also, so it was alleged, the chamberlain's golden key, the cross and the chain, was at Leipsic or Hamburg.

Very well, said Freytag; Monsieur de Voltaire would be under arrest until these things had been duly handed over, and above all the precious book: "Das Buch, welches hauptsächlich mit retour kommen soll, ist bennant *Oeuvres de Poésie*"—"The book, the return of which is of the highest importance, is entitled *Oeuvres de Poésie*."

Voltaire, whose retention of the book and the golden trinkets is unaccountable, and can hardly have been due, as Macaulay has suggested, to negligence, wrote at once for the "great package," and Freytag promised him his liberty as soon as the precious things were handed over. Meanwhile he was under close arrest. He could not leave the inn. At most, he could walk in the garden with secretary Collini. Days passed, and still they waited for that accursed package. This arrest, this outrage (for so it was), became more than irksome; it was terrifying. Thoughts of imprisonment, even of death, came into the raging mind and the anxious heart of Monsieur de Voltaire. It was all very well to rant and bluster at Freytag or Councillor Schmidt: these grave, dutiful Germans had

their orders, and they would carry them out with no deviation, no softening of rigour. After all, what was this runaway Frenchman doing with the *poesies* of the king, their master? It was a solemn business.

And still the days passed, and there was no package, and all the town began to talk, and there were curious visitors at the *Golden Lion*. Among these visitors who should come but the rascally Dutch bookseller, one of the "bungling pirates," Van Duren! It was too much. Voltaire, his nerves all on edge, rushed upon the pirate and slapped him in the face. Van Duren did not at once perceive that he was greatly honoured. "Sir, sir!" cried the anxious Collini; "you have been slapped by the most famous man in Europe."

Letters, entreaties were sent in all directions. The Emperor of Germany was petitioned. Madame Denis hurried from Strasburg to the rescue of her imprisoned uncle; her dying uncle, if he was to be taken at his own word; and Madame Denis was likewise placed under arrest. Baron Freytag and Councillor Schmidt, with their guards posted at the *Golden Lion*, waited for the package.

All this may be grotesque, but it has a more serious aspect. It was an act of lawless tyranny. Voltaire was imprisoned, without any charge, in a free town; a practice contrary, even then, to the first principles of justice. He was not accused of stealing the book and the miserable trinkets, but only of having them in his possession. For five weeks, Voltaire, his niece and his secretary, were kept under arrest in a German inn, in a free town of Germany, by order of the King of Prussia. Even if we discount the exaggerations and lamentations of Voltaire himself, the most unrestrained, most passionate of men, we are right if we consider Frederick's

action as wholly indefensible, and truly astonishing in one who was supposed to combine the wisdom of Solomon with the clemency of Marcus Aurelius. The arrest of Madame Denis, whether due to the fine devotion of Schmidt and Freytag or to an order from Potsdam, was even less excusable; and the whole wretched affair is deplorable from every point of view.

Even after the arrival of the package and the surrender of the book and the trinkets, there were further delays. Voltaire, desperate, eluded his guards, and, with Collini, attempted flight. They were arrested at the barrier, subjected to the coarse affronts of the populace, and taken to the house of Councillor Schmidt, who was a shop-keeper. Here, all their belongings were sequestered, and when Voltaire asked for the return of his snuff-box, he was told brutally that "everything would be locked up, according to custom." Crazy with fear and anger, the miserable man saw an open door and rushed out of it: he was pursued by Frau Schmidt and her servants. After scenes of the most humiliating kind, with Voltaire feigning sickness, he was taken to the *Buck's Horn* inn with Collini, and there guarded by soldiers. In the meantime, Madame Denis had been rudely treated at the *Golden Lion*, and was now sent to rejoin her uncle.

Voltaire had reached Frankfort on the 31st of May; the package arrived on the 18th of June; and it was not until the 7th of July that he was allowed to go. The culmination of this atrocity was the presentation of an enormous bill for the costs of his detention at the *Golden Lion* and the *Buck's Horn*.

We are willing to believe that the treatment of Voltaire at Frankfort was due to the mere boorishness of Freytag

and his lieutenant, to the dull obstinacy of the official mind, and to the zeal of service. Such treatment was probably never a part of Frederick's intention, although he signified his approval of what Freytag had done. However that may be, Frederick's behaviour is not to be excused. Its atrocity can be, at most, a little mitigated by the fact that he had often been duped by Voltaire, and that he had no reason to believe that the *poesies* had been taken away inadvertently. Neither Collini nor Voltaire himself has explained how it was that the book and the chamberlain's badges came to be packed with Voltaire's belongings. And it may be noted, that Voltaire was in no doubt as to the precise packet in which they were to be found. He knew where they were, and he knew that he had no right to them. He could hardly have forgotten that he had been expressly commanded by Frederick to return them before he left Potsdam.

It may have given some satisfaction to Maupertuis to behold the inventor of Akakia thus humiliated and tortured; for we may doubt the assurance of Frederick that Maupertuis was the most forgiving of men.

CHAPTER VII

FIGHTING THE INFAMOUS

NOW, at the age of sixty, Voltaire began to show that peculiar force and brilliance which place him, as a writer, in a category which is altogether his own. And if *Akakia* marks the beginning of the true Voltairean style, the Frankfort affair marks the end of the Voltairean illusions.

Although, on formal occasions, Voltaire would still sign himself "Gentleman in Ordinary to the King," he was cured of any longing for the favours or honours of a court. His thoughts were turned now to ambitions of a different and more rational kind. He had considerable wealth. He was able to think, as one of his age might fittingly think, of comfortable retirement. He desired to live, in his own words, "obscure and tranquil." So he might desire ; but how could a man so famous be obscure ? and how could one with such diabolical energy ever be tranquil ?

From the time of his departure from Frankfort in July, 1753, to the time of the acquisition of Les Délices in March, 1755, he was a wanderer, moving from one place to another in accordance with opportunity or caprice. He was virtually, though not officially, exiled from Paris. The king was opposed to his return, and Madame de Pompadour had become indifferent.

After a stay of a few weeks at Mainz, he was the guest of the Palatine Elector, Charles Theodore, at Mannheim; and a little later, he was in Strasburg. Here he was occupied in writing the *Annals of the Empire*, and a new tragedy, *The Chinese Orphan*. Early in 1754, he was at Colmar. Then he stayed with Dom

Calmet and his monks in the Abbey of Senones for about three weeks; and thence he sought the fine company and the healing waters of Plombières. In November, he was at Lyon, where he met "sister Guillemette," the margrave, and her husband, who had previously paid him a surprise visit during his stay at Colmar. Wilhelmina, so it appears, was anxious to make peace between her brother Frederick and her "brother" Voltaire; but Frederick had written a stiff, dignified letter, in which he complained that Voltaire had broken his word by pestering Maupertuis after he had left Potsdam.

The more Voltaire wandered, the stronger became his desire to settle peaceably in a house of his own—a house, naturally, with a theatre, and gardens, and accommodation for many visitors.

To find such a house was not easy. The craziest fancies passed through his mind. Pennsylvania was talked of; a land of promise in a new world. In a new world there might be room for a new prophet: he would go to Pennsylvania. More sensible and more serious thoughts prevailed, and Switzerland was chosen. He arrived in Geneva on the 12th of December, 1754.

In Geneva he was the guest of the councillor Francis Tronchin, the head of one of the most distinguished families in that town. Voltaire had previously made the acquaintance of the banker, Robert Tronchin, at Lyon; and he was soon to know intimately the celebrated physician, Theodore. Not long after his arrival, Voltaire, Madame Denis, and the secretary Collini, were housed in the vast, cold, draughty and sombre castle of Prangins, lent by the proprietor, who was a friend of the Tronchin family. This was anything but comfortable. The strident, quavering voice of his master

summoned Collini at every moment: Make up the fire! Shut the window! My fur cloak! My cap!—With satisfaction might Collini write: "We are going to leave this castle."

First, a house was rented at Monrion, between Lausanne and the lake; and then the property of Saint-Jean, near Geneva, was purchased, to be known and made famous under the new name of Les Délices.

Again, as at Cirey (but with what a different companion!), Voltaire had the delight, the annoyance, the incessant cares, of arranging a house and grounds to his liking. "We are occupied, Madame Denis and myself, in making boxes for our friends and our chickens. We have ordered coaches and barrows; we plant onions and orange-trees, carrots and tulips; we are short of everything—but Carthage must be founded. My territory is scarce larger than the bull's hide given to fugitive Dido."

Here, of course, a theatre was built; and here, to the grave displeasure of Geneva ministers and their following, comedies and tragedies were played, and the great Lekain made his appearance. But these tormenting pleasures could not occupy him exclusively. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the "citizen of Geneva," was beginning to make a stir; and a quarrel with Jean-Jacques was clearly inevitable.

Rousseau, who believed sincerely that Voltaire would approve of his teaching, sent a copy of his *Origin of Inequality* to Les Délices. Upon this, Voltaire wrote him a long letter, which, in a somewhat altered form, he printed incongruously in the first edition of the *Chinese Orphan*. The letter was a declaration of war:

"Sir, I have received your new book against the human race, and thank you for it. You may give

pleasure to men, to whom you show the truth, but you will not correct them. We cannot choose colours too strong for painting the horrors of human society, from which our ignorance and weakness promise so many consolations. No one has ever employed so much wit in trying to make brutes of us; in reading your book, one has a mind to start running on all fours."

To this, Rousseau answered with dignity: "I have every reason to thank you, Sir. In sending you the outline of my sad thoughts, I never believed I was making you a gift worthy of your merit, but I meant to acquit myself of a duty, and to render you the homage that we all owe to you, as to a Chief. Sensible, moreover, of the honour you do my country, I share the gratitude of my compatriots; and I hope it will be greatly increas'd, when they have profited by the instructions you can give them." He proceeds with a short review of his ideas, cool, measured and extremely graceful, and showing in every line the most profound respect.

Voltaire's poem upon the Lisbon earthquake (1st of November, 1755), a bitter and splendid satire against optimism, was a challenge to Rousseau's doctrine of providence. Clearly, the two men could never be in agreement, and a fierce explosion of hatred was only a matter of time.

If Rousseau was at last provoked to violence by the attacks of Voltaire, he was never the aggressor. We have no wish to compare Jean-Jacques with the author of *Candide*, for no two men could have been more unfitted for each other; but it may be allowed that Jean-Jacques had fine qualities of courtesy and restraint which made him, in more than one way, superior to Voltaire.

We turn gladly from the unhappy quarrel with Rousseau to Voltaire's collaboration with Diderot and d'Alembert in the work of the *Encyclopaedia*. Here indeed was a labour after his own heart. The *Encyclopaedia* was far more than a mere compendium of knowledge, such as industry alone might compile. It was a great engine of war directed against the Infamous. In a manner by no means equivocal, the articles of the *Encyclopaedia* attacked the bases of superstition, proclaimed the emancipation of the human mind, pointed the way to the attainment of real knowledge, and proved, or sought to prove, that men could never be happy while they were ignorant, irrational or prejudiced.

No other book or collection of books had so great an effect upon the movement of the age. Proscribed or censored, furtively sold or furtively imported, the work played its part in bringing about the final destruction of the old order. To those who planned the *Encyclopaedia*, religion appeared to be a source of discord, misery and injustice. The civil authority, ruled or encouraged by the leaders of religion, was not less corrupt than the church herself, and not less deserving of unqualified censure. If, then, it was religion which had brought society to such a pass, religion must be abolished.

Nor was this view unaccountable in the France of the eighteenth century. At no other period had religion decayed to such a foul compost of horrors and persecutions. At no other period had there been a clergy more cynical, more vicious, more addicted to every kind of chicanery and indulgence. At no other period, and in no other country, had justice been so corrupted, or the law so open to contempt. And at no other period had wealth, learning and comfort

been distributed with a more shocking inequality. All this, said Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists, was due to the prevalence of the Infamous. At the foot of their letters, they wrote the mystic abbreviation of their countersign—"écr. l'inf."—"écrasons l'infâme": "crush the Infamous!"

What did they mean, precisely, by this term? They meant, partly, the dominance of what was then called the Christian church; but they meant a great deal more. The dragon of the Infamous represented, in a visible and vulnerable form, all the cruel, unworthy and oppressive elements in the social order. Most of those elements, they said, were developed from ignorance and superstition, and many of them from the cowardice which is a natural weakness of autocratic government. The term comprehended, also, those tendencies which we now understand by the single word reaction. The Encyclopaedists were therefore among the leaders of the great intellectual revolution of the eighteenth century, a revolution in which the solvent agencies of ridicule and scepticism played a decisive part. In the mind of Voltaire himself, the Infamous had a more extended personal meaning; it covered everything with which he was in disagreement, and could be applied without hesitation to his enemies.

In December, 1756, Voltaire's fury was aroused by an ugly decree of the Infamous. Admiral Byng, whose fleet had been scattered by the French off Majorca, was tried by a court martial and sentenced to death.

No one doubts that Byng was offered up by a frightened ministry to a clamorous rabble. The English had been defeated, but this grim sentence would prove the energy of the national character, and would have a cheering effect upon the services.

With noble generosity, Voltaire took up the defence of the Admiral. He had met Byng (at that time a young naval officer) during his visit to England. He wrote to de Richelieu, who had been the French commander at Majorca:

"An Englishman came to see me the other day, and lamented the fate of his friend Admiral *Byng*. I told him you had done me the honour of telling me that this sailor had by no means misconducted himself, and that he had done all he could. He replied, that one word from you would justify him; that you had made *Blakeney's* fortune by the esteem with which you had publicly honoured him; and that, if I would transcribe the favourable words you wrote to me concerning *Byng*, he would send them to England. I beg your permission to do so; I cannot, in duty bound, undertake anything without your consent."

De Richelieu, with equal generosity, replied :

"Sir, I am profoundly movéd by the affair of Admiral *Byng*: let me assure you that all I have seen and heard of him is entirely to his honour. After having done all that could be reasonably expected of him, he ought not to be blamed for having suffered a defeat. When two generals dispute the victory, altho' equally men of honour, it is obvious that one of the two must be defeated; and there is nothing against M. *Byng* except that he was beat. His conduct was altogether that of a skilful seaman, and worthy of being justly admir'd. . . . I am convinced (and 'tis the general opinion) that if the English had obstinately continu'd the fight, their entire fleet would have been destroyed. There

could be no more signal act of injustice than what is now actually contemplated against Admiral *Byng*."

A copy of this letter was at once forwarded by Voltaire to Byng, with the following note:

"Sir, tho' I am almost unknown to you, I think it my duty to send you a copy of the letter I have just received from the Marshal de Richelieu; honour, equity and humanity command me to place it in your hands. This testimony, so unexpected and so noble, from one of the most sincere and most generous of my compatriots leads me to presume that your judges will render you the same justice."

De Richelieu's letter actually gained four voices in favour of pardon, but the majority of the judges voted for death, and Byng was shot upon the quarter-deck of the *Monarque* on the 14th of March, 1757. He entrusted his executor with the conveyance of his warmest gratitude to Voltaire and to the Marshal—"so generous a soldier."

Less serious concerns now occupied a great part of Voltaire's time. The furnishing and arrangement of Les Délices continued to be the source of many pleasures and many anxieties for whole months on end. "I am become a gardener, a vine-dresser and a workman. I must needs do in a small way what the King of Poland [Stanislas] has done in the grand style; I must plant, uproot, and build houses for rats, while he dreams of palaces. I hate the towns, I can only live in the country, and, since I am old and feeble, I can only live in my own house." The "pretty nudities" of Natoire and Boucher were to be copied

" to cheer his age "; everything was done to make the house gay and comfortable.

But all the time, Voltaire was busy with his pen. It may be doubted whether he ever passed a day in which he did not write many pages, whether of some new work, or some careful revision, or of notes and letters. The *History of Russia under Peter the Great* was now contemplated, and Voltaire was engaged in a long correspondence with Schouvaloff, the chamberlain of the Empress Elizabeth. *Candide*, the work which, at the present day, is unquestionably the best known of all his writings, was probably begun during his visit to the Elector at Mannheim in July, 1758. He was also employed on the congenial labours of the *Encyclopaedia*, corresponding chiefly with d'Alembert, who had visited him in 1756, but writing on occasion to Diderot. In August he spent a part of his time in a new property, a house in the Rue du Grand-Chêne at Lausanne.

It was at Lausanne that he was visited by Gibbon, then a youth of twenty-one, in August, 1758.

Gibbon was freely admitted to Voltaire's private theatricals, and saw the great man himself play in *Zaïre*, *Alzire*, *Zulime* and the *Prodigal Son*. " His declamation," he said, " was founded upon the pomp and cadence of the old theatre, and display'd rather an enthusiasm for poetry than a feeling for the natural sentiments. My ardour, which was quickly remark'd, rarely failed of procuring me a ticket. The habit of this amusement strengthened my taste for the French theatre, and that taste has perhaps weakened my idolatry for the gigantick genius of *Shakspear*, impress'd upon us from childhood as the first duty of an *Englishman*. The spirit and philosophy of *Voltaire*, his table and

theatre, sensibly contribute to the refinement of Lausanne and the improvement of manners."

Another visitor of this period was the Italian poet, Bettinelli, who has left us a lively account of his interview, and one which is worthy of partial transcription:

"When I arrived at Les Délices, he was in his garden; I went up to him and told him who I was. 'What!' cried he, 'an Italian, a Jesuit, a Bettinelli!—'tis too much honour for my cabin. I am but a peasant, as you see,' he added, showing me his stick, which had a little mattock at one end and a pruning-knife at the other; 'with these tools I sow my wheat, grain by grain, like my salad; but my crop is more abundant than the one I sow in my books for the good of humanity.' His grotesque and singular figure made upon me an impression for which I was not prepared. Beneath a cap of black velvet, which came down to his very eyes, could be seen a huge perruque, which covered three-quarters of his face, and made his nose and chin even more pointed than they are in his portraits. His body was wrapp'd in a cloak from head to foot; his glance and his smile were full of expression. . . . The conversation often turned upon the King of *Prussia*. He had just been told that, after losing a battle, he had beaten the Duke de Deux-Ponts, raised the siege of Neiss and of Leipsick, and put to flight the Austrians in Bohemia. 'Is it possible!' cried Voltaire. 'This man astounds me always; I am sorry I have quarrelled with him.' In this prince, he admired the quick movements of Caesar, but his admiration ended always with an epigram against Caesar. He had a monkey which he call'd *Luc*, and it pleased him often to give this

name to the King of *Prussia*. One day, I expressed my surprise at this. 'Do you not see,' he replied, 'that my monkey bites every one?'—and he fell a-laughing."

This offensive nickname of *Luc* (which, to a French eye, is a wicked anagram) was often enough applied to Frederick in speech and letters; but his correspondence with Frederick, verses, badinage and all, was briskly renewed by the end of 1759. The two men had been drawn together, in the April of that year, probably for the first time and certainly for the last time, by the mutual experience of a real emotion: their sorrow at the death of the margrave, Wilhelmina.

In the winter of 1758, Voltaire acquired the domain of Ferney. This domain comprised, then, a large house, a ruinous church, and a rather dilapidated hamlet. He acquired, at the same time, the deeds of Tournay, another decayed estate, which allowed him to call himself the Count of Tournay, a title of which he occasionally made use.

Ferney is about five miles to the north of Geneva, below the Jura slopes, in the little province of Gex, and on French territory. Voltaire was now the owner of four properties, four citadels or places of retreat: two at Lausanne and two near Geneva. By the acquisition of Ferney, he had a footing in two countries, France and Switzerland: a matter of sound strategy rather than of mere ostentation.

At Ferney he spent the greater part of the last twenty years of his life. Here, cultivating his garden, playing, jesting, quarrelling, and always fighting the Infamous, he became the great Voltaire, the man who shocked, surprised or delighted the whole of civilised Europe.

He secured at Ferney, not the peace which he pretended to seek, but at least immunity from serious persecution. On the one side of his frontiers he could defy the sour Calvinists of Geneva; on the other, he could hurl thunders at the Jesuits of France. At Ferney he had a sheltered house for the winter; at Les Délices, a pleasant summer residence; at Lausanne, the charming little theatre of Monrepos. But Ferney became his real home; and it was here, as we shall see, that he entered upon his last astonishing phase of the *seigneur de village* or Patriarch.

Voltaire was now sixty-five. And at this age, the age at which most men suffer a decent eclipse or potter placidly within a narrow circle of domestic enjoyments, be began to flame out in the supreme display of his powers. He was like one of those astonishing rockets, which crack and flash with the greatest violence and brilliance towards the end of their long flight, scattering in all directions a hundred bright stars. And as children cry with fear or delight while the rocket pours out its energy in this wholly unexpected fashion, so men were moved to fear or delight, to applause or anger, by the ascending and flashing energies of this extraordinary man.

The expense of maintaining his estates was no small matter, and, rich as he was, Voltaire's revenues were heavily taxed.

"I know well that I am ruining myself," he wrote to the banker, Tronchin. "But it was absolutely necessary that I should be the master of Tournay and Ferney, because it will happen infallibly, in thirty or forty years from now, that the priests of Baal will desire

to have me burned like *Antoine* or *Servet*, and I must be prepared to hang 'em from the battlements of my castles. I have a great love for countries which are free, but I love even more to be master in my own house. . . . I have wished, for once in my life, to show how, in the present age, one is able to feed an hundred and fifty souls with nothing at all. For one month, I was quite penniless, and in spite of that I was buying land, for I love land more than money. My miracle is a mighty pretty one, but we must not enlarge upon miracles, or they are discredited. I ask you, therefore, for five hundred louis to set up my credit again. And I would reckon this very credit as a prodigy. I was born poor enough. All my life I have plied a beggar's trade, that of scribbling upon paper, that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. And yet, here I am with two castles, two delicious houses, a revenue of seventy thousand livres, two hundred thousand livres of ready money, and a few scraps of royal bounty, which I don't trouble to compute."

With such affluence, and so much of comfort and security, Voltaire could afford to laugh at the spite or petty persecution of bigots.

On the 2nd of March, 1759, *Candide* was denounced by the Venerable Company of Geneva, and was publicly burnt by the executioner. Voltaire retorted by circulating a number of irreligious pamphlets in the town—a minor skirmish with the Infamous.

Between the author of *Candide* and the ministers of Geneva there could never be any question of truce. The ministers and the council of Geneva had forbidden plays and theatres. They had been outraged by the article on Geneva in the *Encyclopaedia*, written by d'Alembert, and frankly Voltairean. In this article,

the ministers themselves had been accused of Socinian leanings, and the establishment of a Genevese theatre was strongly recommended. Jean-Jacques, like a good citizen, had taken the side of the ministers, and had written, in reply to d'Alembert, his famous and provoking *Letter upon Spectacles*. And so, Jean-Jacques and the Venerable Company, and all the black gowns of Geneva, became a part of the Infamous.

In August, 1759, Voltaire heard of the death of Maupertuis. "What say you of Maupertuis?" he wrote to d'Alembert; "dead between two Capucins. He had been sick for a long while of a surfeit of vanity; but I never thought him either a hypocrite or an imbecile." Voltaire could feel no charity, no generosity towards the dead man; and he had some reason to reproach himself for having added so much to the bitterness of his last years. This ugly pursuit of Maupertuis, not ceasing with his death, marks an almost incredible persistence of malice. In a letter to Frederick, Voltaire spoke of this death with a flippancy so outrageous, and accused Maupertuis of such baseness, that Frederick answered with furious indignation. It is true that his answer was mostly in doggerel verse; it was none the less effective. He compared the poet to a "vile raven" croaking with hideous joy at sight of carrion, and finished by conjuring him to think of his honour and of the "blackness of his incorrigible heart."

To these just reproaches, Voltaire replied with a violent counter-attack. First, he tried to justify his accusations, and then he rounded briskly upon Frederick. It may be doubted whether any great king has ever been attacked with such vigour in a letter sent to him personally.

"You have done me harm enough. You have embroiled me for ever with the King of France; you have caused me to lose my pension and appointments; at Frankfort, you treated villainously both myself and an innocent woman, who was dragg'd in the mire and put in a prison; and finally, in honouring me with your letters, you poison the sweetness and consolation of this intercourse by bitter reproaches. Is it possible 'tis you who treat me thus, when I was solely occupied for three years, though without success, in trying to serve you, with no other aim save to follow my own way of thinking?

"The greatest evil which has come of your works, is that they have allowed all the enemies of philosophy in Europe to say: Philosophers cannot live in peace and cannot live together. Here is a king who does not believe in Jesus Christ; he summons to his court a man who thinks likewise, and he abuses him; there is no humanity in these pretended philosophers, and God makes them punish each other.

"That is what they say, that is what they publish on all sides; and so, while fanaticks are united, philosophers are unhappily scatter'd. And whilst they accuse me, at the court of Versailles and elsewhere, of having encouraged you to write against the Christian religion, 'tis you who reproach me, and add this triumph to the insults of the fanaticks! This makes me hate the world with good reason; I am happily retir'd from it in my solitary domains. I shall bless the day when, dying, I need suffer no more, and above all need suffer no more from you; but I shall then wish you a happiness which your state makes difficult, and which philosophy alone can procure for you amid the storms of your life, if your fate allows you to cultivate exclusively

and continually those principles of wisdom which you have; worthy principles, but all dried up by the passions inseparable from a high imagination, and partly, too, by irritability and by vexing circumstances which pour their poison upon your spirit; and also by the unhappy delight which you have always taken in seeking to humiliate other men, to gall them in speech and writing; a pleasure unworthy of you, and the more so as you are raised above them by your rank and by your exceptional gifts."

Having thrust home, on both sides, with telling effect, Voltaire and Frederick renewed their correspondence with perfect amiability.

We cannot follow at length the various quarrels in which the author of *Candide* was engaged during his first years at Ferney. Even before he took up residence in the castle, he had declared war upon the curé of Moens, who was a pestilent rogue. Then came the quarrel with the President de Brosses, that cultured and accomplished man, over a few bundles of wood; and then a true victory over the Infamous—the restitution to its rightful owners of some land seized by the Jesuits of Ornex.

An attack of a lighter kind was directed against the most ridiculous and most conceited of French poets, the Marquis Lefranc de Pompignan.

Lefranc was a writer of tragedies, verses, religious poems, and rhyming translations. He had some facility, a little skill, and an infinite amount of assurance. He was a pompous, affected creature, whose fatuity exposed him to the deadly aim of satire. On the 10th of March, 1760, he was elected to the Academy. His oration to the members was a foolish, aggressive piece of bombast,

full of petulant commonplace and manifestly directed against the new philosophy. The President, in his reply, compared Lefranc to Moses, and his brother, the Bishop of Puy, to Aaron.

It was not long before the unhappy Lefranc heard in his ears Voltaire's diabolical laughter. Ah, ah ! Moses Lefranc de Pompignan ! Consider, my good Moses; is it wise to cry down the age when one's own works do it so little credit ? Or is it wise, when you are admitted to a society of men of letters, to talk so noisily and so rudely about men of letters, and thus to insult both the company and the public ? Have a care, my good Moses !

Lefranc de Pompignan, still buoyant with a huge inflation of vanity, sustained for a while these dreadful attacks. *Whens*, *Ifs*, *Buts*, and *Whys* followed each other in rapid succession. Madame Lefranc was driven half crazy with anger. But Moses, rushing blindly and sublimely to his fate, published a *Memoir to the King*, a memoir in which he ascended to incredible heights of pretentious glory. The most wicked inventions of Voltaire himself could hardly keep pace with the enormous folly of Lefranc.

" All the court," said Moses, " saw in what fashion Their Majesties gave me a welcome. Let the *Universe* know also, that Their Majesties have taken notice of my *Work*, not as a novelty of little consequence or of passing value, but as a production not unworthy of the particular Attention of *Sovereigns*." And he went even further. Speaking of his visit to the court, and of his return to his native place, he said: " I was receiv'd at *Montauban* with honours so *extraordinary*, that the memory of them will be long preserv'd in the Town and in the rest of the Province." The memory of poor

Moses is indeed preserved; but not in the way he desired.

As Maupertuis had exposed himself by his *Letters*, so Lefranc exposed himself by this grotesque vanity. Voltaire, who could hardly believe his eyes, fell on his prey with savage delight. "My doctor," he said to Marmontel, "has ordered me a course of Pompignan every morning by way of exercise." The journey of Lefranc to visit the king, and his reception at Fontainebleau, were told of in a little masterpiece of concentrated irony:

"At Cahors I found my picture in *acqua-tinto* hanging in the ale-house, and beneath it were five little verses with a pretty allusion to the stars, among which I was seated. . . . When I reached Orleans, I found that the canons already knew by heart the most remarkable passages in my discourse. I pursued my journey to Fontainebleau, and the next day I went to the King's levee, accompanied by M. Fréron, whom I had expressly commanded. As soon as the King perceiv'd us, he addressed himself graciously to each. 'Monsieur le Marquis,' said His Majesty, 'I know that you have as great a reputation at Pompignan as your grandfather the *Professor* had formerly at Cahors. Have you not with you that fine sermon of your composing which has made so much noise?' I then presented copies to the King, the Queen, and His Grace the Dauphin. The King had the finest parts read aloud to him . . . joy overspread every countenance; the whole company looked at me with eyes half clos'd, raising gently the corners of the mouth towards the cheeks, which is the pathologick indication of delight. 'Faith' said His Grace the Dauphin; 'we have but one man in France

who can write in such a style—'tis Monsieur le Marquis de Pompignan.' "

This deadly prose was followed by even more deadly verse, by a satire *Upon Vanity*, and then came the *News from Montauban*. Even the puffy pride of Lefranc was pricked at last, and the wretched man collapsed. The final blow was presumably unintentional. Lefranc's tragedy of *Dido* was followed at the Comédie by the *Fool Punish'd* of Pont-de-Veyle. The parterre was in ecstasies of mirth; and although on the second night the comedy of Pont-de-Veyle was replaced by another, the change merely emphasised the irony of the sequence. Moses Lefranc de Pompignan found himself pursued everywhere by cruel reminders of the Voltairean attack, and particularly by lines from the poem on *Vanity*, such as

> " Unhappy the wight, above all, in this age,
> Who thinks if he's odd he's a great personage.
> . . . . . .
> And sure, I am *something*, says Master Lefranc."

Moses de Pompignan was extinguished. He retired to his castle at Montauban, wrote no more, or wrote discreetly, and never again dared show his face at the Academy or approach the king.

It was at this time that Voltaire began to build, of all things, a new church at Ferney. The old church was in bad repair, it was ugly, uncomfortable, ill designed for service.

His motives were not altogether pious. The fantasy of building a church was one which appealed to his ironical humour, and the church, as it stood (or crumbled) obscured his view. Parts of the old church were to be

moved and used in the new building; the tall wooden cross which stood above the cemetery was to be taken away. (There is no authority for the legend that Voltaire, in ordering the removal of the cross, had said "Take away that gibbet.") And so was built "the one church in the universe dedicated to God himself," and over its doorway men could read that famous incription: DEO EREXIT VOLTAIRE.

Hearing that the grand-niece of Corneille was destitute, and that she was a gentle, charming and modest young woman, Voltaire adopted her. Mademoiselle Corneille became a member of the Ferney household, and she was cared for in the most exemplary fashion. Voltaire himself taught her the art of writing. She wrote little notes to him, and he corrected them; she read the great authors of his choice, and then gave him an account of her reading. Mademoiselle Corneille was eighteen years old when she arrived at Ferney in the winter of 1760. Her sweetness of temper, her natural gaiety and quaint humour gained the affection of every one in the house; and this vicarious paternity must have been particularly grateful to her benefactor. Voltaire, indeed, came to think of Mademoiselle Corneille as he might have thought of a child of his own. And it should be noted, that she was encouraged to fulfil all the duties of a Christian, to attend church, and to pay heed to the counsels of her spiritual advisers.

The righteous, of course, were scandalised. A pretty house indeed! they said, and a pretty teacher for a young respectable girl! Mademoiselle Corneille, said the viper Fréron, had fallen into good hands. But Fréron was crushed by dreadful *Anecdotes*, and wished he had not spoken so hastily.

Never had Voltaire's activity been more surprising.

His name was legion. He watched over the lives and welfare of the people of Gex with unceasing vigilance. The affairs of his estate received, in all their details, his close attention. He was always quarrelling with two or three persistent adversaries. He was always entertaining friends or visitors. Plays were frequently performed in his theatre at Tournay. In 1760 he produced, in addition to a mass of lesser works, the comedy of the *Scotchwoman* (against Fréron) and the fine tragedy of *Tancred*. And yet he was never well. Sometimes he would spend the whole morning in bed, waving desperately his thin arms, complaining to worthy Tronchin, calling with fevered impatience for soothing drinks or comforting appliances.

All the time, he was profoundly concerned with fighting the Infamous, and with the preparation of that great engine of war, the *Encyclopaedia*. "How goes the *Encyclopaedick Dictionary*?" he wrote to d'Alembert. "Is it to be disfigured and debased by vile concessions to fanaticks? or are we really bold enough to tell the dangerous truth?" And the furious voice cries to young Damilaville: "Rush, all of you, upon the *inf.* . . . What concerns me is the propagation of the faith, of truth, the advance of philosophy, and the trampling down of the *inf.* . . ." Soon he was engaged in grim battle, no mere polemic or war of words, with the Infamous in a terrible form.

The affair of Calas, which we are about to describe, gave him an eminence in the popular mind far above that which he could have attained by writing or precept alone, and set him in the first rank of the great humanitarians. Let us examine, first of all, the simple facts of the tragedy.

Jean Calas, a worthy and highly respected man, lived in Toulouse. He was a Protestant. He carried on a considerable trade in various Indian stuffs, and had a small shop and warehouse in the Rue des Filatiers. His family, in 1761, consisted of three sons, two daughters, and his wife.

The eldest of the sons, Mark Antony Calas, was then twenty-eight years old. He was a sturdy but melancholy young man, suffering bitterly from thwarted ambitions. The idea of becoming, like his father, a humble cloth-merchant, had no attraction for him. He had studied the law, and, as he had an easy manner and facile speech, there seemed every reason to suppose that he would make a good advocate. But before he could practice, it was necessary for him to obtain a certificate of orthodoxy, of loyalty to the Catholic faith. This was usually accorded as a matter of form, but when young Calas applied for it he was told that he was not eligible. Here, then, was an obstacle which he could never surmount, for Mark Antony refused to become a member of the Holy Church, or to " perform any act of Catholicity." What was he to do? He would not take a subaltern position in his father's business, but had less objection to being on the footing of a partner. It seems that he actually made this proposal, and that Jean Calas was unable to give his consent. Mark Antony, proud, sensitive, and with a notion of his own value, felt that his life was a failure. He found a gloomy relief in private theatricals, declaiming with infinite fervour and pathos the sad lines of *Polyeucte*, or reciting the monologues of Hamlet. At other times he would seek the distraction of billiards in the public saloons.

And here it is important to note, that Mark Antony, desperate as he was, never considered the possibility of

changing his professed religion; a thing which he might have done easily enough, and which his younger brother, Louis, had done already.

On the fatal evening of the 13th of October, 1761, the Calas family sat down to supper with a young friend, Gaubert Lavaysse, who had looked in for an hour or so.

The party consisted of Jean Calas, his wife, Mark Antony, the second son, Pierre, and the visitor, Lavaysse. They were attended by the maid, Jeanne Viguière.

While they were eating their dessert, Mark Antony rose from the table. There must have been something strange or ominous in his manner, for the maid, looking at him, asked whether he was cold. "No," said he; "on the contrary, I am burning." And he left the room.

At nine o'clock, M. Lavaysse took his leave, and went down the stairs with young Pierre Calas. They observed with surprise that the door of the shop was open. Pierre had a candle in his hand, and they went into the shop to see if all was in order. And there they saw, hanging from a calico róller, the dead body of Mark Antony. The grey cloth coat which he had been wearing, and his nankin waistcoat, were neatly folded upon the counter.

News of the suicide ran quickly round the town, and soon the house was filled with curious neighbours, with police officers and magistrates. Among the magistrates was that ferocious imbecile, David de Beaudrigue.

Suddenly, from the confused murmur of many voices, there came a loud accusing cry: "Mark Antony has been strangled by his Huguenot parents, for fear he should turn Catholic!"

No accusation could have been more absurd, but none has ever had more terrible results. There is no thrill

so pleasing to the vulgar mind (the penny-paper mind of the present day) as the excitement of a tragedy. What is more, the Huguenots of Toulouse were a despised or hated minority; and thus, to the mere sadistic passions of the mob, there were added passions of an even more hideous nature. Without any charge, without the least pretence of any legal formality, de Beaudrigue had the entire household, including Lavaysse and the servant Jeanne Viguière, conveyed to the town prison.

While the wretched family were thus imprisoned, the body of the suicide was buried with extraordinary pomp and ostentation by the Catholics of Toulouse. After witnessing this impressive funeral, clearly the funeral of a martyr, no reasonable man—no Catholic, at any rate—could doubt that Mark Antony had been foully murdered by his parents. In the vulgar mind, Calas was condemned already.

Having tormented their prisoners for more than four weeks with questions and depositions, the magistrates of Toulouse duly made known their decree: Calas, his wife and son, were to be subjected to the torture; Lavaysse and the servant were to be "presented" to the torture, and then to undergo a fresh interrogation.

An appeal was lodged by the prisoners, and the case was taken before the parliament of Toulouse. The sentence on Lavaysse and Jeanne Viguière (a sentence which the magistrates had no legal right to impose) was revoked, and the court proceeded with a formal trial of the accused. On the 9th of March, 1762, after hearing witnesses who had witnessed nothing, but who were fervently religious and determined to prove, at any cost, the guilt of Calas, the court gave judgment.

Of the thirteen judges who had tried the case, seven voted for the death of Calas, three for torture only, two for a further examination of the circumstances, and one for acquittal. A majority of seven was not enough to carry the sentence; a casting vote was given to the councillor Bojal, and he joined the seven men who voted for death.

The details of the sentence were now promulgated: Jean Calas was to undergo the question ordinary and extraordinary; wearing a shirt only, he was to be taken in a cart from the prison to the cathedral, and there, before the great doors, on his knees and with a wax taper in his hand, he was to beg in all humility for the pardon of God, of the king and of the state; he was then to be taken to the Place Saint-George, where, on a scaffold in view of all, the executioner would break his arms, legs, thighs and loins; after that, he would be tied to the wheel, his face towards the sky, living, if it pleased God, " in pain and repentance of his crimes "; and finally, the dead body would be flung into a fire, and the ashes scattered to the wind.—As for the son, Pierre, he was to be banished in perpetuity. Madame Calas, Lavaysse and the servant were to be released.

Here we may well pause in horrified bewilderment. We may ask ourselves, what complicity of wickedness, of crude fanatism, brought about this terrible drama. How could such a thing have been possible ? For the honour of humanity, we would find, if we could, some kind of extenuation, some alleviating circumstance. We can find none. When the facts of the case were examined, a year or so later, it was proved that there was no evidence against Calas. We would gladly believe that the judges had some reason for supposing their verdict justified; for, if that was not so, these seven

men were little better than seven devils or seven imbeciles. And yet, the most impartial research has failed to show us even the shadow of a reason.

Jean Calas was handed over to the executioner on the 10th of March. He made no complaint, accused no one, protested only his perfect innocence. First came the torture of the question, then the penance. Two Jesuit fathers attended him. Stretched on the cross, his bones crushed by every stroke of the bar, he never cried out, never ceased, when questioned, to declare himself an innocent man. At last, when the poor dying creature was tied to the wheel, de Beaudrigue, in a frenzy of cruel impatience, shouted in his ear : " Wretch ! behold the fire which is to consume thee ! —speak the truth ! " But Calas could say no more; he could only turn his head in weariness and pain. Then came the fire, and the tragedy was over.

When he first heard of this, Voltaire could not believe that the parliament of Toulouse had condemned and cruelly murdered an innocent man. But, as the truth became clear, he hesitated no longer. With all his energy, and all the influence at his disposal, he sought to prove the innocence of Calas; and at once offered his protection to the widow and her family. On the 29th of March, soon after he had received the news of the affair, he wrote to d'Alembert. After telling him of the death of Mark Antony Calas, he went on :

" The city of Toulouse, greatly exceeding Geneva in folly and fanatism, made a martyr of this young man. No one thought of finding out whether he had hung himself, which is highly probable. They buried him with pomp in the cathedral; some of the parliament assisted with bare feet at the ceremony; the new saint

was invok'd; after which, the criminal court broke the father on the wheel by a majority of eight votes against five. This judgment was the more Christian, since there was no evidence against the accused. . . . All our heretickal cantons are crying aloud, all say that we are a nation as barbarous as we are trivial; able to break men, but not able to fight, and passing from *Saint Bartholomew* to the *Comick Opera*. We are become the horror and scorn of Europe."

Then he pressed for exact information on all matters connected with the trial and execution of Calas. De Richelieu advised him not to meddle in the affair; Calas, he said, was guilty.

But the two brothers of Mark Antony, first young Donat and then the fugitive Pierre, had found refuge near Geneva. If the judges were right, Pierre had been an accomplice in the murder of his brother. He had been confined in a monastery at Toulouse, and forced to change his religion, but had succeeded in escaping. Voltaire, at first on his guard, spoke often to the young man; he employed respectable persons to watch him, to observe his conduct, to see what company he chose. Before long, he was convinced, by the talk and behaviour of the two brothers, that there could be no doubt whatever as to the innocence of Calas and his family. In April (when still undecided) he had written to a lady whose name is not preserved:

" It is true, Mademoiselle, that, in a reply to M. de Chazelles, I demanded information concerning the horrible adventure of *Calas*, whose son [Donat] has excited my sympathies as well as my curiosity. I have sent to M. de Chazelles an account of the clamours

and sentiments of all the strangers who come to see me; but I could not have spoke to him of my opinion upon this cruel business, for I have none. I have only seen the statements in favour of *Calas*, and that is not enough to justify me in taking a part. I have sought to be inform'd in the quality of an historian. An event so appalling as that of an entire family accused of a parricide committed through religious fervour; a father dying upon the wheel for having strangled his son with his own hands, upon the mere suspicion that the son wanted to quit the opinions of *John Calvin*; a brother fiercely charg'd with having helped to strangle his brother; the mother accused; a young advocate [Lavaysse] suspected of having served as hangman in this unheard-of execution; this event, I say, belongs essentially to the history of the human spirit and to the vast portrayal of our follies and furies, of which I have already given the outline. . . . However things may turn out, I persist in hoping that the parliament of Toulouse will condescend to make publick the trial of *Calas*, as that of *Damiens* was publish'd. . . . These two trials concern the human race, and if aught can check the rage of fanatism among men, it will be the making known and the *proving* of the murder and sacrilege which brought *Calas* to the wheel, and which left the whole family a prey to the most dreadful suspicions. Such is my sentiment."

He was right. The affair of Calas has a place in the dark histories of cruelty and persecution, in the "vast portrayal" of human activities. He was yet in some doubt as to the nature of the tragedy, so clearly a tragedy from any point of view; but he was not far from conviction. In May, he wrote to d'Argental:

"The Marshal de Richelieu has wrote me a long letter upon the Calas family, but he knows no more than I do. The parliament of Toulouse, which now sees what a shocking blunder it has made, is preventing the truth from being known. It has always had the idea that the whole Calas family, assisted by their friends, hanged young Calas to prevent him from turning Catholick. With this idea, they had the father broke on the wheel, hoping that the poor fellow, who was sixty-nine years of age, would confess everything. The poor fellow, instead of confessing, called upon God to witness his innocence. The judges, who had him broke upon simple conjecture, having absolutely no juridical proofs, but persisting in their opinion, condemned to banishment one of the sons of Calas, who was suspected of helping to strangle his brother; they had him taken to one of the city gates by the executioner, with a cord round his neck, and then made him return by another gate, clapp'd him in a monastery, and forc'd him to change his religion. All that is so illegal, and the spirit of faction is so clearly perceiv'd in this horrible occurrence, foreigners are so incensed, that 'tis inconceivable the Lord Chancellor will not have this extraordinary decree properly examined. If ever there has been need to know the truth, it is, methinks, on such an occasion."

On the 11th of June, when the widow Calas was in Paris, trying to obtain justice, he wrote two letters, one to d'Argental, and the other to the great advocate, Elie de Beaumont.

"Divine angels, I throw myself at your feet, and at those of the Count de Choiseul. The widow Calas is in Paris, with the design of claiming justice; would

she dare this if her husband was guilty? She is of the ancient house of Montesquieu (the Montesquieus are a family of Languedoc); she has sentiments worthy of her birth, and superior to her dreadful misfortune. . . . I have sent her a little paper which will be her passport to your house. . . . My dear angels, this good work is worthy of your heart."

And to Elie de Beaumont:

"Sir, I commend to you the most unhappy of women, whose demand is the most just in the world. Tell me at once, I beg you, what steps can be taken; I charge myself with repayment. . . . This affair, in which I take the liveliest interest, is so extraordinary that it calls for extraordinary measures. You may be sure that the parliament of Toulouse will not provide us with the means of attacking it; it has forbidden the communication of the documents, or even the report of the arrest, to any person whatsoever. Only great influence can obtain from My Lord the *Chancellor*, or from the *King*, an order to dispatch copies of the registers. We are seeking this influence: the voice of a troubled, anxious publick will surely obtain it. To know on which side is the most horrible fanatism, is a matter which concerns the *State*. I doubt not that such an enterprise will appear to you mighty important; I beg you to speak of it to the magistrates or juriconsults of your acquaintance, and so to contrive matters that 'tis spoke of to the *Chancellor*."

It was Voltaire himself who had persuaded Madame Calas to seek justice. He paid the expenses of her journey and of her residence in Paris, and he engaged without hesitation the two greatest advocates of the time: Elie de Beaumont and Loyseau de Mauléon. He himself stirred public opinion by a pamphlet on *The*

History of Elizabeth Canning and the Calas Family, and by an immense number of letters, as well as by that tremendous personal influence which, in a hundred subtle ways, he could now exercise.

Of his letters actually addressed to Madame Calas, not many have been preserved. One is of doubtful date, but was probably written in 1763, when the papers relating to the trial had been sent to Paris by order of the Privy Council:

"Madam, all those who have the happiness to serve you in so just a cause have reason equally to congratulate themselves. You know I have never doubted the issue of your litigation. It seems to me that the King's Council are engag'd to give you entire satisfaction by forcing the judges of *Toulouse* to send the procedure and motives of the arrest. You may now enjoy your repose; I send you, and the young ladies your daughters, the most tender and sincere compliments. You have deported yourself like a worthy mother, a worthy wife; the people should praise you as much as they should abhor the judgement of *Toulouse*. Meanwhile, be consoled in knowing that the whole of *Europe* does justice to the memory of your husband; you are a grand example to the world. I shall ever be, with the sentiments which are due to you, Madam, yours, etc."

He had tried, though apparently in vain, to win the support of Madame de Pompadour. But there was no need to invoke the aid of courtiers and favourites. The conscience of the entire nation was deeply moved, and the proof of the guilt or innocence of Calas became a national concern.

We may here anticipate the end of the long drama.

On the 9th of March, 1765, forty judges, assembled in council, unanimously revoked the sentence of the court of Toulouse. The innocence of Jean Calas, and the ghastly incompetence or more ghastly fanatism of his judges, were proved conclusively. Madame Calas and her daughters were received by the queen, and the family were indemnified by the royal bounty: 12,000 francs for the widow, 6,000 for each of her daughters, 3,000 for Pierre Calas, 3,000 for the servant, Jeanne Viguière, and 6,000 towards the travelling, residential and legal expenses. No action was taken against the magistrates of Toulouse, but David de Beaudrigue, deprived of his office in February, 1765, died a raging lunatic.

Long before the Calas affair was ended, Voltaire was busy with another.

Peter Paul Sirven, living with his family at Castres in Languedoc, was a land surveyor and estate agent. He had three daughters; the eldest married to a shopkeeper, the two others living at home with their father and mother. All were Protestants. The second daughter, Elizabeth, was a poor, frail, half-witted creature, presumably a mental defective with strongly marked sexual proclivities, and their frequent corollary —hallucinations. In March, 1760, Elizabeth wandered away from home. Sirven was informed by the Bishop of Castres that his daughter had professed an ardent desire to become a Catholic, and to be admitted to the convent of the Black Ladies. Actually, she had done nothing of the kind. She had been influenced by the sister of the bishop, to whom a wandering half-witted girl seemed to offer reasonable chances of conversion, and to be a proper and easy subject for the attentions

of the church. Elizabeth entered the convent, and was driven half mad by the austerities of a religious life. In about seven months' time, having greatly disturbed the Black Ladies by fits, visions and convulsions, the girl was sent back to her parents. Apparently she had not been converted after all. On the 15th or 16th of December, Elizabeth disappeared for the second time. Nothing more was heard of her until, on the 3rd of January, her dead body was found floating in a well at St-Alby, near Castres.

In this unpleasant story there are certain features which grimly resemble those of the Calas affair. At this very time, the Calas family were in chains at Toulouse, and to the heated mind of the local magistrate it was clear that the Huguenots of Languedoc were killing their children to prevent their conversion to the holy church. A writ was issued for the arrest of Sirven, his wife, and their two daughters.

Hearing of this, ill prepared as they were, the terrified family decided upon immediate flight. After many weeks of alternate hiding and travelling, destitute and wholly dependent upon the charity of strangers, exposed to all the miseries and dangers of a winter in the mountains, the unhappy Sirven reached Lausanne. Here he was joined, two months later, by his wife and his daughters. The Sirvens were now deprived of all their property; Sirven and his wife were convicted, in their absence, of parricide. Sirven was to be broken alive, and his wife hanged. The daughters were convicted as accomplices, and were condemned, first to witness the execution of their parents, and then to be banished. And as the Sirvens could not be hung in person, they were hung in effigy.

Sirven managed to earn a living in Geneva, while

his wife and children were charitably maintained by the republic of Berne at Lausanne. Before they had been long in Switzerland, the four Sirvens were presented to Voltaire at Ferney. At once he undertook their defence.

As in the affair of Toulouse, he set about this new battle with tremendous energy and courage, and employed for the Sirvens, as for Madame Calas, the great lawyer, Elie de Beaumont.

He was now defending an obscure family in a case which, though tragic enough, lacked the awful horror of the Calas affair, and would never have been known to the world if he had not taken it up with such magnificent zeal. For no less than nine years he fought for the Sirvens against the dark powers of the Infamous. In 1769, Sirven was again condemned; in 1771, an appeal was heard before the parliament of Toulouse. This was the very parliament which had sent Calas to his fearful death, but even parliaments learn their lessons; a new spirit was moving, and the Sirvens were acquitted.

We have summarised in a few words the course and result of a long defence, and one which required extraordinary tenacity of purpose and a truly noble devotion. In 1771, let it be remembered, Voltaire was in his seventy-eighth year. And it cannot be said that, when once he had set the defence in motion, he left matters to take their course. Nor can it be said that he was bound to win, with truth, reason and justice on his side. The passions of cruel, foolish and ignorant men, particularly when they believe themselves religious, know little of reason, care little for truth; nor is there any oppression more dreadful to endure, more blindly unscrupulous, than the oppression of men who see the weakening of their power and credit.

In the defence of the Sirvens we have a noble instance of the courage and loyalty of a single man. The Sirven affair was not, like that of Calas, a matter which became of national importance. There was no overwhelming tragedy. There was no great popular movement in favour of the accused. It was not felt that the honour of the whole nation was concerned here, as it was in the other case. For these very reasons, the defence was the more difficult, and required a greater degree of resolution. Yet the issue, in both cases, was precisely the same. Innocent people had been condemned without evidence. The mere barbarity of the sentences, hideous as it was, ought not to obscure this prime issue. All the appalling details of the death of Calas were authorised by the law and cordially approved by the church ; the ultimate horror was not here, but in the fact that Calas had been condemned without justice. Voltaire himself always laid stress on this point. He was protesting, not so much against methods of torture and execution, as against the enormity of the whole procedure. If the Infamous was to kill men judicially, without proving any crime, how could France be admitted to the community of civilised peoples? That was the question. And with all his intense compassion for the suffering of the victims, it was as the defender of principles rather than as the defender of persons that Voltaire fought with all his energy against the Infamous. To write a *Henriade* is less admirable than to fight the battle of humanity and justice and civilisation.

In 1770, he undertook another desperate defence—that of Montbailly and his wife, falsely accused, like the others, of parricide. Montbailly was executed; but Voltaire obtained the reversal of the sentence and saved the wife, to whom the council of Arras made full reparation.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PATRIARCH

THOSE who visited the old man at Ferney came away with a sense of bewilderment. This terrible old man, so dry, fragile and withered in appearance, amazed them by his abounding energy, his tricks, alertness and vehemence. And yet he was always ill, always dying. He was crushed, so he said, by his "fourscore years and fourscore maladies." In the morning he would be dejected, peevish, full of querulous complaints and wearisome demands; but the arrival of a visitor quickly brought him back to life. The best perruque was trimmed, the best coat brushed, and the old man would meet his guest with all the grace and gaiety in the world. He would show proudly the house, the garden, his books and pictures: a Venus by Veronese, a Flora by Guido, and above all, La Tour's fine pastel of Madame du Châtelet. He would argue, joke, bluster, laugh, declaim, with shrill voice and quick gestures. His conversation, not always of the most elevated kind, was invariably amusing. From every civilised country, men of learning or distinction came to see him. He could entertain them on a scale that was almost princely. After a play in his own theatre, the table was laid for sixty or even eighty persons. There were always twelve horses in the stables, and always a multitude of servants busy in the house and gardens. In 1768, after a drastic reform of his budget, the expenses of Ferney could not be less than 40,000 livres a year.

We have a pleasant account of a visit to Ferney, written by the Prince de Ligne in 1763.

"I was eight days in his house, and I wish I could remember all the sublime, gay, simple and loveable things which illustrated his character; but truly that is impossible. I laughed and I admired. I was continually intoxicated. Even in his errors, his faulty knowledge, his whims, his lack of taste for the fine arts, his follies and pretentions, all that he was and all that he could not be, all was charming, new, provoking and unforeseen. . . . He wore grey shoes, iron-grey stockings, a large dimity waistcoat reaching to his knees, a big, trailing perruque and a little cap of black velvet. On Sunday, he would sometimes put on a fine broidered coat, all of a piece, vest and breeches of the same sort, but the vest with great flaps galooned in gold after the *Burgundian* style, with huge sleeves and lace extending to the tips of his fingers; for *thus*, said he, one has a noble appearance. M. de Voltaire was good-humour'd with all his neighbours, and made them laugh. He embellished all that he saw and all that he heard. He questioned an officer of my regiment, whose answers he thought sublime. 'What is your religion, sir?' he demanded.—'My parents reared me in the *Catholick* persuasion.'—'A splendid reply!' said M. de Voltaire; 'he don't say that he *belongs* to it!' All this might seem ridiculous to relate, and likely to make him absurd; but one should see him, animated by his fine, lively fancies, bestowing freely his wit, his gay sallies, upon every one; dispos'd to see and believe in what is good and beautiful, abounding in sound sense, and causing it to abound in others; relating all to what he writes and what he thinks; awakening speech and thought in those capable of either; giving help to all the unfortunate, building for poor families and a good fellow in his own; a good fellow in his village, a good fellow and a

great man at once—an union without which no one is ever completely either the one or the other: for genius gives a wider scope to goodness, and goodness makes genius more humane."

After the suppression of the Jesuits in 1762, Voltaire received into his house a gentle, friendless man, Father Adam. This amiable Father, with his neat, thin figure, his black clothes and air of sad propriety, became a familiar of the household. He did not mind the little jokes of his patron, which, in his case, were always of a kindly sort. He would smile rather mournfully, place the tips of his long fingers together, and shake his head. In his heart, he believed that Voltaire might be converted. He prayed, with fervent desire, for this conversion. Boswell, who saw him at Ferney in 1764, describes him as " a lively old man with white hair," and tells us how Voltaire spoke of him as " a broken soldier of the Company of Jesus." Father Adam, moving softly and unobtrusively in the background, and still asserting, with pathetic dignity, his right to wear a hat indoors, was always treated with kindness and respect. Indeed, he took his place in the family picture. We see him, in conversation pieces, with Doctor Tronchin, Madame Denis and the pretty maid, standing by Voltaire's bed or taking tea in the drawing-room.

In fine weather, Voltaire spent much of his time walking in his park or up and down his long avenues, or round his gardens. He had a little lawn, with a lime tree in the middle of it, which was called his " study." When he passed through the hedge into the " study," it was understood that no one was to disturb him.

He was fond of receiving visitors in the garden, and of showing them his trees, plants and flowers. In the

midst of conversation, he would dart suddenly upon some lurking parasite or hidden weed, with a quickness of eye and motion remarkable enough in the case of an old man who declared that he was blind, infirm, and dying.

After dinner, he used to go for a drive in his coach, and after supper he would retire to his room and work. He slept only for four or five hours, and was in the habit of writing at all hours of the night. He had a contrivance for holding several candles at the head of his bed, and if he woke at any time, and felt disposed to work, he summoned the secretary, Wagnière, by rapping upon the floor. Much of his writing was done while he lay in bed, either at night or in the late hours of the morning. He seldom rose before noon.

It is interesting to compare the impressions of a graceful humbug like the Prince de Ligne with those of two other visitors, different both in race and character: that vain, ridiculous, invaluable creature, James Boswell; and the Middlesex patriot, John Wilkes.

Boswell, whose happiness in being able to force himself upon the attention of a great man was only equalled by his pleasure in writing about him afterwards, could not leave Geneva without paying his respects to Monsieur de Voltaire. He had taken care to provide himself with a letter of introduction from "a Swiss Colonel at the Hague." On the 28th of December, 1764, he presented this letter at Ferney. He had the satisfaction of being received by "two or three footmen," but Voltaire was unwell, and not in the best humour. It is quite conceivable that Boswell annoyed him. He "sat erect upon his chair and simpered when he spoke." But then, says Boswell, "he was not in spirits, nor I either."

With the awful tenacity of a journalist, Boswell decided, the very next day, to write to Madame Denis and to beg for another interview. "I was in the finest humour," said the complacent fellow to his friend William Temple, "and my letter was full of wit." So he came back, and was even allowed to spend the night at Ferney. There seems to have been no other company, and in the evening the old man and the young visitor (he was twenty-five) settled down to a long talk.

They must have been oddly contrasted: the old man, shrill and vehement; the young visitor, with his round, serious face, dreadful pertinacity, slow northern voice and foolish questions. "I placed myself by him. I touched the keys in unison with his imagination. I wish you had heard the Music. . . . When he talked our language he was animated with the Soul of a Briton. He had bold flights. He had humour. . . . He swore bloodily as was the fashion when he was in England. . . . At last we came upon Religion. Then did he rage." A great bible was opened on the table between them. "And if ever two mortal men disputed with vehemence we did. . . . For a certain portion of time there was a fair opposition between *Voltaire* and *Boswell*." But not for long. "The daring bursts of his Ridicule confounded my understanding. . . . He went too far. His aged frame trembled beneath him." The old man was growing tired and desperate; and still the solemn youth, with dreadful composure and dreary persistence, poured out one question after another. "But must we not believe, Sir, in the Master of the Universe?" Well might the aged frame tremble. At last, using a trick which he often employed, Voltaire shammed a faint. He fell back in his chair and closed his eyes. Boswell, who had no intention, either of

retiring or of calling help, sat and watched him. And when the old man hopefully opened his eyes again, the solemn youth was still there.

A more placid conversation was clearly desirable. Just as well to admit the Master of the Universe, and have a little peace. "He exprest his veneration—his love—of the Supreme Being, and his entire resignation to the will of Him who is All-wise."

And what of immortality? said James Boswell. "He says it may be; but he knows nothing of it." And the next morning, the old man was careful not to show himself until his guest had gone; but he sent him a little note, in which he spoke lightly of "that pretty thing call'd Soul," and admitted that, for his part, he was "but a very ignorant fellow."

The visit of John Wilkes took place a little later (in 1765), and he wrote a manly, simple account of his impressions:

"I have been with Voltaire at Ferney, and was charmed with the reception he gave me, and still more with the fine sense and exquisite wit of his conversation. I think he is the most universal genius, the most amiable as well as the wittiest of our species. He is a divine old man, born for the advancement of true philosophy and the polite arts, and to free mankind from the gloomy terrors of superstition. . . . He has done more to persuade the practice of a general toleration, of humanity and benevolence, than the greatest philosopher of antiquity. His conduct in the affair of the family of Calas is more meritorious than the whole lives of most saints. He is exactly well-bred, and in conversation possesses a fund of gaiety and humour which would be admir'd in a young man, and he joins to it

those immense stores of literature only to be acquir'd by age. . . . He lives in the noblest, gayest style of a *French* nobleman, receiving all strangers, giving plays in his own theatre, and you have the entire command of his house, equipages, horses, etc. He is adored by all the inhabitants and vassals of his extensive domains, and with reason, for he hath been the creator of everything useful, beautiful, or valuable in the whole Tract near him, which before was a rude Wilderness. . . . He has built little towns and villages, established several manufactures, and peopled the country with a happy race of mortals who are daily blessing their Benefactor."

Of these "little towns and villages" we shall have occasion to speak presently. The picture of John Wilkes, highly coloured as it is by the enthusiasm of a liberal mind, is true in substance. The *seigneur de village* was building good farms and houses on his estates, and was filling them with quiet, industrious people who found life hard enough in Geneva.

During the last fifteen years of his life, Voltaire published more than three hundred miscellaneous writings, and although many of these are fragments or trifles, such prolixity is truly amazing. He wrote or dictated in this time more than five thousand letters. He carried on a most delightful correspondence with his old friend, Madame du Deffand, and he began, in 1765, to exchange letters with the Empress Catherine of Russia.

His admiration for this great ruler may be compared with his earlier admiration for Frederick. Catherine was a new Star of the North. Her liberality and courage, the tolerance of her administration, her industry and vigilance, delighted him. "Your Imperial

Majesty," he said, " has found a road to glory unknown to all other sovereigns." He wrote for her, as he had written for Frederick, adulatory verses. " Sir," she said, " my head is as hard as my name is inharmonious; I will answer your delicious verses in clumsy prose. I have never wrote verses, but I admire none the less those of others." Nor would she allow that she was the Star of the North—a mere *aurora borealis*, a flickering occasional radiance, perhaps, but no star !

With Madame du Deffand he could exchange ideas and compliments with entire freedom. These two old people were extremely well fitted for mutual entertainment, and perhaps for the truest friendship of which either was capable. They were united by rare gifts of wit, gaiety and malice, and by those mutual memories of a past age which are so dear to survivors. They were both secure, both independent; they could think and write as they pleased:

" I can never allow you," he said, " to tell me that the more one thinks, the more unhappy one is. That is true of those who think ill; I don't mean those who think ill of their neighbours, which is often extremely amusing; I mean those who think all awry: they are doubtless to be pitied, because they have a sickness of the mind, and to be sick is always a sad condition. But you, whose mind has the best health in the world, consider, if you please, what you owe to nature. Is it nothing to be rid of those unhappy prejudices which fetter the greater part of mankind, and women in particular ? . . . I would console you, too, by telling you that I think your situation very superior to my own. I find myself in the very middle of Europe. Every traveller comes to see me. I have to hold my

own with Germans, English, Italians, and even Frenchmen, whom I shall never see again; while you see only those who are dear to you."

He wrote to her of his thoughts, his plan of life, his views and actions, with entire candour. In no other letters, not even those written to the d'Argentals or young Damilaville, did he speak so frankly. It is ridiculous to suppose that he was never sincere, ridiculous to see in his courteous phrases only the amusement of a shallow mind. He never took the trouble of writing long and frequent letters except for those he admired, or loved, or hated. He wrote to Madame du Deffand as to a congenial spirit; and even if we can excuse Mr. Lytton Strachey for talking of these two singular old people as "a monkey and a cat" (and we agree that Madame du Deffand was a cat), we must remember that monkey and cat were fond of each other. Take, for instance, the intimate revelation of the following letter, written early in 1766:

"There are those who envy me this rocky retreat, who would have pity neither on my age nor on the maladies which oppress me, and who would persecute me beyond the tomb; but I am fully reassured by your letter, and you must have seen, by my last one, with what confidence I open my heart to you. This heart is full of you, and is continually sensible of your merit, your well-being; it loves your candour and imagination, and will be attached to you as long as it beats in my feeble body. . . .

"I have nothing in common with our modern philosophers, except their horror of intolerant fanatism; a horror which is very reasonable, and with which we

ought to inspire the human race, for the surety of princes, the peace of States, and the welfare of individuals.

"That is why I have associated myself with men of merit, who, perhaps, are too inflexible in their way of thinking, little inclined to conform to the usage of the world, seeking rather to instruct than to please, wishing rather to be heard than to listen to others—but who atone for these faults by immense learning and by great virtues.

"Yet be persuaded, Madam, that of all friendships, yours is the most dear to me. I cannot, without extreme bitterness, see myself in the necessity of dying without having spent a few days chatting with you; it would have been my dearest consolation. Your letters supply it: I hear you speak as I read your words. . . . I love you, Madam, because I love the truth: in one word, I'm in despair at not being able to pass a few days with you before I return this wretched machine to the four elements."

Yet, in spite of these complaints of the feebleness of age and the weight of maladies, Voltaire was never more furiously active with his pen. He made a practice (as we have often seen already) of denying the authorship of his works, or even of imputing them to other writers. He had, or believed he had, some excuse for this procedure. He adopted it so that he might avoid persecution. The heavier the fire from his guns, the more anxious he was to conceal their position, and to move audaciously from one emplacement to another. This was all a part of the campaign against the Infamous. He did not want to be hampered by the problems of defence at a time when all his energies were directing this awful bombardment.

It was a part of his policy, therefore, to deny the authorship of one of the most famous of all his works, the *Dictionnaire Philosophique Portatif*, or *Portable Philosophick Dictionary*, which had first appeared furtively in 1764.

In this work, he had chosen a form ideally suitable for the conveyance of his views, and capable, at any time, of enlargement. Under chosen headings he could string together a series of devastating and brilliant essays on church, religion, history, ethics, fables, and all that he desired to attack or defend, from Abraham and anthropophagi to tyranny and tolerance, from dreams, miracles and idolatry to the Chinese and Japanese catechisms and the falsity of human virtues. In later editions he added much to his original work, and his editors have added even more. But the original book presented, in a very concise and very convenient form, the whole essence of the Voltairean doctrines. It was, according to the righteous Bonnet, "the most detestable of all the books of this pestilent writer." Nor was it long before the righteous council of Geneva had it burnt publicly by the executioner—probably the best possible method of advertising a new book.

The *Philosophick Dictionary* played a part, as we shall presently see, in the grim tragedy of La Barre; a tragedy not less appalling than the affair of Calas. It caused more anger, more delight and more astonishment than any book of the same period; more, even, than the *Social Contract* or the *Emile* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was, in the eyes of the orthodox, a dreadful book, a book stinking of infidelity, full of a subtle corrupting poison. Catholic or Calvinist, priest or minister, all men of good principles were profoundly shocked. Voltaire, of course, was quite as much surprised as any

one else. How could people suppose him capable of such a thing? Poor old dying man—why could they not leave him alone?

"God preserve me, dear brother," he wrote to Damilaville, "from having the least part in the *Portable Philosophick Dictionary!* I have read some of it; it smells horribly of the faggot. But since you are curious about these works of impiety, so that you can refute 'em, I'll search for a few copies and send them to you on the first occasion." Sending a few copies meant, of course, the circulation of the book in Paris. A little later he wrote to d'Alembert:

"I have heard speak of this abominable little *Dictionary*; 'tis the work of Satan. . . . Be sure that, if I can get hold of it, you shall have a supply." And again: "This collection is by several hands, as you will have easily perceived. I know not by what madness people insist in believing me the authour of it. The greatest service you can render me is to affirm sturdily, upon your share in *Paradise*, that I have no part in this work of *Hell*, which, moreover, is very ill printed, and full of ridiculous faults. . . . I suppose there are but few copies of this atrocious *alphabet* in Paris, and those not in dangerous hands; but, if there should be the least danger, I beg you to advise me of it, so that I may disavow the work, with my usual candour and innocence."

As the clamour grew more intense, with louder and longer echoes, echoes heard only too clearly at Fontainebleau and Versailles, so the denials became more vehement, and the origins of the book were described with more convincing detail.

"Dear brother," he wrote again to Damilaville, "the tempest growls on all sides against the *Portatif*.

What barbarity to accuse me of writing a book stuff'd with quotations from St Jerome, Ambrose, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen. . . . The book is *known* to be by one named Dubut, a little Dutch theological apprentice."

Then came a more subtle, though rather contradictory statement to d'Argental: "They ascribe the *Portatif* to me, because it actually contains certain articles which I formerly intended for the *Encyclopaedia*, as *Love*, *Self-Love*, *Socratick Love*, etc.; but 'tis proved that the rest is none of mine. . . . In one word, I have no part in this edition, I have never sent the book to any one. . . . The King is too just and too good to condemn me on the word of frivolous backbiters." And finally, also in a letter to d'Argental: "I beg you to observe the *certain truth* that the *Portatif* is by several hands; and 'tis of no small advantage to the establishment of the reign of reason, that several persons, among whom there are actually Clergymen, have contributed to this work. Certain councillors of Geneva have seen absolute proof of this with their own eyes."

But all these fictions, cowardly and futile as they well may seem, had no effect, unless to remove any doubt as to the author of the *Dictionary*.

In October, 1765, the possession of this book was cited in the evidence against a young man who was condemned to death for sacrilege and blasphemy—the unhappy La Barre.

On the night of the 8th of August, 1765, a crucifix on the Pont-Neuf at Abbeville, and another in the cemetery of St Catherine, had been mutilated. This hateful outrage angered even those who were least religious, and the whole town was concerned in finding and punishing the culprits.

Before long, suspicion pointed to a group of silly young gentlemen, La Barre, his friend Gaillard d'Etallonde, Moisnel, and two others. It was known that La Barre, d'Etallonde and Moisnel had insulted a religious procession by not removing their hats. On the 24th of August, a warrant of arrest was issued against all three. D'Etallonde had already taken to flight: La Barre and Moisnel were brought before the magistrates.

It was proved that all the accused had been guilty of singing profane songs, reciting blasphemies, making a mock of saints and sacraments, reading such forbidden books as the *Nun in the Nightgown*, the *Doorkeeper of the Chartreuse*, the *Gallantries of Theresa*—and the *Philosophick Dictionary*.

And while the case was being heard, priests were grimly chanting in the town, and people were going in procession to the outraged crucifix in dark fervours of atonement. Already the Bishop of Amiens had prayed that the offenders might be made " worthy of their last agonies in this world "—a prayer which could have but one aim and one meaning.

In this atmosphere of terror, Moisnel, who was a delicate boy of seventeen or eighteen (fifteen, according to Voltaire), broke down. He told all that he knew, inculpated La Barre, and stated that d'Etallonde had mutilated the crucifix on the Pont-Neuf. After a trial conducted, so it would seem, with little regard for correct procedure, sentence was given on the 28th of February, 1766. Gaillard d'Etallonde and La Barre were condemned to do penance before the main door of the church of St. Wolfram, then to have their tongues cut out, and then to be beheaded in the square of Abbeville, after which their heads and bodies were to

be consumed in a great fire. Sentence in the other cases was withheld, and the accused were allowed the right of appeal. It has been said, that the judges reckoned upon a royal pardon, and wished only to make a terrifying example of La Barre. However that may have been, Louis XV was inflexible. Let the youth suffer, he said, for his abominable wickedness. We must remember that the queen of Louis XV was an extremely pious woman.

La Barre, brave and careless, was taken to the scaffold on the 1st of July. As a final grace, his tongue was not cut out, and the poor boy was able to jest with the executioner. "What!" said he, as they cut off the long hair over his neck; "would you make a chorister of me?" The square of Abbeville was full of people, elegant ladies among them, and when the executioner struck off the head with one clean blow, there was a loud clapping of hands. The body was thrown into the fire, and with it, in accordance with the sentence, the *Portable Philosophick Dictionary*.

Voltaire, when he heard of the execution, was filled with terror. He felt himself concerned personally in the death of La Barre; it was like a dreadful challenge on the part of the Infamous. "You know," he cried to d'Argental, "that, of the twenty-five judges, only fifteen voted for death. But when more than one third of the voters incline towards clemency, the other two thirds are indeed cruel. On what does the life of men depend! If the law was clear, all the judges should be of the same opinion; but even if that is not so, even if there is no law at all, should five additional votes be enough to destroy, in the most horrible torments, a young man whose only crime is foolishness? What more could they have done if he had killed his father?"

What was more, he said, there was no legal penalty for such an offence as that of La Barre and d'Etallonde: it was left to the wisdom or fantasy of the judge. And two days later, he cried out even more bitterly:

"The atrocity of this event fills me with rage and horror. I repent indeed of having ruined myself in building houses and doing good on the borders of a land where, in cold blood and before going to dine, people commit abominations which would revolt a parcel of drunken savages. And yet 'tis a people so gentle, gay, and light! Anthropophagous *Harlequins*! let me hear no more of you. Go from the stake to the masquerade, from the Grève to the Opéra Comique; break Calas, hang Sirven, burn five poor young gentlemen who, as my angels say, ought to have been confin'd for six months at Saint-Lazare—I would not breathe the same air as you do. . . . What! the crazy whim of five old fools is enough to inflict tortures which would have made Busiris tremble!"

And then, the intolerable thought of being associated, through the little *Dictionary*, with the awful sentence! Was there not, here, an implication too dreadful for words? Might it not be said, that here was one whose books corrupted young men, and brought them to a death of shame and agony? Nor was this all. In the library of the unhappy La Barre they had found the *Pucelle*, and the *Epistle to Urania*, a folly of his own youth. Again, with desperation, but without relieving his own mind or convincing others, he denied the terrible *Dictionary*. On the 19th of August he wrote to de Richelieu:

" You know the earth is covered with oaks and reeds: you are the oak, and I am an old reed all bent by storms. I will admit fairly that the tempest which has destroy'd this young fool, La Barre, has bowed my head. . . . I must tell you a singular thing. They have pretended to assert, in the evidence against La Barre, that he made genuflections before the *Philosophick Dictionary*;—*he never had this book.* In the report of the proceedings it is said that he and one of his comrades went on their knees before *The Doorkeeper of the Chartreuse* and Piron's *Ode to Priapus;* they recited the *Litanies of the Bum;* they indulg'd in the pranks of young pages—there was not one of the whole band capable of reading a work of Philosophy. . . . I am interested in this *Philosophick Dictionary* which has been most falsely imputed to me. I am so little the authour, that the article *Messiah*, which may be found entire in the *Encyclopaedick Dictionary*, is by a Protestant minister, a man of wealth and condition, whose manuscript, wrote by his own hand, is in my possession. There are several other articles whose authours are known, and, in one word, no one can ever convict me of being the authour of this work."

And so Voltaire, miserable and frightened as he certainly was, lied to his friends, and lied in vain. La Barre " never had the book." He was not capable of reading such a book. In any case he, Voltaire, had nothing to do with it. But he says nothing, it will be observed, of the burning at Abbeville.

La Barre was dead; but something might still be done for young d'Etallonde. He entered the service of the King of Prussia, and Voltaire, moved by generosity in which, perhaps, his conscience played a part, did

all that he could to recommend the young man to Frederick's attention. He wrote several letters to d'Etallonde himself, and had the satisfaction of seeing him make good progress. "Serve the *philosophick King*," he told him, "and detest for ever the most detestable of superstitions."

Meanwhile, Ferney was prospering. Farmers, artisans and clockmakers were living there in clean new houses, and the craftsmen of Ferney were producing silk stockings of beautiful texture and little watches with fine cases of gold or enamel.

The *seigneur* Voltaire was ruining himself, so he said, in the building of these new farms and factories and houses; but he was taking a pardonable delight in the industry and well-being of his vassals. Let Rousseau, that odious fellow, say what he pleased: here, in these neat houses and busy people, were pictures of true philosophy.

It was all pretty enough, but the *seigneur* had no intention of losing on his village industries; clocks, watches and stockings had to be sold, and he was always bringing them persistently to the notice of his friends. In all that he did, he acted with a bewildering complexity of motive: much of this, unquestionably, was pure benevolence, and much was mere commercial enterprise. Again, the idea of founding a *colony*, a colony ruled by philosophic principles, had a peculiar fascination for him. He had, in fact, a scheme for a settlement of Encyclopaedists at Clèves, on the territory of the King of Prussia. Frederick would have granted the land, but Diderot and d'Alembert were not so anxious to leave Paris.

There remained the satisfaction of presiding over

the lives and prosperity of his industrious workers at Ferney. He planted trees where no trees had been before, he built villages and planned his fields, he bought the newest kinds of machinery and employed the most capable teachers. By working in a little field of his own, he set the example. He desired to see round him, not only a happy and industrious people, but a people who would turn to him with seemly gratitude as their master and benefactor. So, as the coach with its blue lining and silver stars rumbled down the long avenue at Ferney, the labourers could look up and cry, "There he goes—the good *seigneur*, the kind *seigneur*; God bless him!"

His pride in the industries of Ferney was not wholly of the vainglorious kind. He took a real delight in the advancement of his people. "To my thinking," he wrote, "there is nothing prettier than a large rustick mansion, through whose great doorways you may see, going and coming, wagons laden with all the spoils of the fields. . . . On the one side are fifty handsome cows with their calves, the horses and oxen are on the other; their fodder falls in the racks from huge granaries; in the midst are the barns where the grain is crushed; and you know that all the animals, each one lodg'd in his proper place in this great building, understand mighty well that the fodder and oats which it contains belong to them by right."

For some years the colony was prosperous enough. The watches were sold to royal customers, they were sent to Versailles, to St Petersburg, to Constantinople, to Morocco (which Voltaire called "the heart of Africa"); the silk stockings were patronised by the ladies of Paris. But after the fall of the friendly minister de Choiseul at the end of 1770, and the

weakening of Voltaire's credit, the trade of Ferney declined.

In 1772, Voltaire wrote sadly to Madame du Deffand: "I had thought to see my colony destroy'd. As soon as one tries to do good, one is sure to find enemies. . . . Write prose or verse, or build houses, 'tis all one; you will certainly be pursued by envy. There is but one means of escaping this harpy; it is, never to write anything save one's epitaph, to build only one's tomb, and to get inside it as quickly as one can. . . . When I tell you, Madam, that I have builded a little town which is pretty enough; that is mighty ridiculous, but 'tis very true. This town has even carried on a considerable trade, but, if they go on cheating me, all must perish."

In speaking of the fall of de Choiseul, we have moved some way in advance of the period we now have to consider—the years immediately following the tragedy of La Barre.

Affecting not to hear the sombre growling of Rousseau, the Patriarch busied himself with works of every conceivable kind. And Rousseau had reason for growling. In spite of Jean-Jacques and the Calvinist opposition, a theatre had been set up in Geneva. This theatre, after some months of precarious existence, was burnt down. Even if it was not intentionally fired, no efforts were made to save the building, and people, when they heard it was "only the theatre," emptied their buckets in the gutter and went home again.

In a cruel grotesque poem upon the *Civil War of Geneva*, Voltaire not only attacked Rousseau with indecent fury, but accused him of having planned the destruction of the theatre.

The baiting of Rousseau was never a very serious occupation. He was a "madman," a quarrelsome dog

who had lost all his friends (which was only too true), a silly fellow who could not leave any one alone.

The Patriarch had other concerns. His literary performance was almost incredible. In 1767 and 1768 he published more than fifty various writings, including the play of the *Scythians*, the *Examination of Lord Bolingbroke*, the *Defence of my Uncle*, the well known stories of the *Princess of Babylon*, *The Simpleton*, *Charlot*, and the *Man with Forty Crowns*, the splendid dialogues of the *Count de Boulainvilliers*, the *Singularities of Nature*, *Brother Pediculoso*, the *Pyrrhonism of History*, and the comical *A.B.C.* And all the time he was managing his estates, carrying on an immense correspondence, receiving endless visits, and often entertaining in the grand manner. On the occasion of his own particular festival (the 4th of October) in 1767, a high mass followed by a Te Deum was performed in the new church at Ferney, in the presence of a whole regiment of troops and all the notables of Gex. After that came a theatrical performance in his own house; then a mock-heroic apotheosis of the Patriarch, a grand supper and a ball.

We need not speak of the perfidy of young La Harpe, who stole the manuscript of the *War of Geneva* and the *Memoirs*, or of his expulsion, together with his accomplice, that detestable creature Madame Denis. Both were eventually pardoned. We have to describe two shocking affairs, which do little credit to the Patriarch.

In April, 1768, he decided to receive the Easter Communion in the church at Ferney. He obtained a casual absolution from a monk who had dined with him, and on Easter Sunday he dressed with unusual care. No doubt he attired himself "*in the Burgundian manner*," with his galooned waistcoat. This occurred in the absence of Madame Denis, and Voltaire requested

the secretary, Wagnière, to accompany him. "I have a mind," he said, "to preach a little to these rascals who will persist in stealing." He walked to the church, preceded by a "superb" offering of *pain bénit*, and accompanied by two armed gamekeepers. After receiving the sacraments, he turned suddenly at the chancel rail and began to deliver an address to the bewildered congregation. "Natural law is the most ancient—" and he proceeded, if Wagnière is correct, with "lively, eloquent and pathetic reproaches" on the subject of pilfering. When this had gone on for a few moments, the priest, with a gesture of petulance and dismay, went back to the altar and continued the office. The extraordinary preacher concluded his discourse with a few flattering words addressed to the curé and returned to his place.

One of the most curious results of this escapade was the reception of the news at Versailles. Poor Marie Leczinska, like other women with bad husbands, had become profoundly religious, and she heard with magnanimity and satisfaction that Voltaire had mended his ways and returned to the true faith. The king, too, openly made known his entire approval.

Not so the Bishop of Annecy, Monseigneur Biort. The Bishop, who knew Voltaire, and knew all the circumstances of this abominable farce, wrote to the Patriarch with dignified restraint, with charity and hopefulness, but with a stern note of warning:

"They tell me, Sir, that you have received the Easter Communion. Many persons have been little edified by this, because they imagine 'tis only one more comedy for the publick, in which you would again make sport of what is most sacred in our religion. As for me,

Sir, I think more charitably; I cannot persuade myself that M. de Voltaire, the great man of our age, who, by the force of pure reason and the principles of a sublime philosophy, has declared himself above all mere pride, all the weaknesses and prejudices of humanity, could have been capable of betraying and dissembling his sentiments by an act of hypocrisy which in itself would suffice to tarnish all his renown, and to debase him in the sight of all thinking men. I must believe that all your actions are marked by sincerity. . . . If, on the day of your Communion, you had been observ'd, not preaching to the people in the church about theft and pilfering, but proving to them, like another Theodosius, by your sighs, your tears and lamentation, the purity of your faith, the sincerity of your repentance, and the disavowal of all the unedifying principles which they might suspect in the past by your manner of speaking and acting, then no one could possibly have regarded as equivocal your apparent manifestation of religion. . . . But, whatever may be said of the past (which I must leave to the Great Surveyor of hearts and consciences), the quality of the tree will be judg'd by the fruits; and I hope that, by your future works, you will leave no room for doubting the probity and sincerity of what you have already done. . . . A wearied body, already bowed beneath the weight of years, warns you that you approach the term which all the famous men who have preceded you have reach'd at last—men who are now almost forgotten. In allowing themselves to be dazzled by the false light of a frivolous and fugitive glory, most of them lost sight of those immortal gifts and glories, far worthier to have been the objects of their hope and striving. Please Heaven that you, wiser

and more prudent than they, will concern yourself only in the pursuit of that sovereign good which alone can fill the emptiness of a heart that finds nothing here wherewith to be content ! "

" This letter," said the Patriarch in reply, " causes me much satisfaction, but some surprise. How can you reproach me for having fulfilled the duties of which every master should give the example upon his own territory, which no Christian should dispense with, and which I have fulfilled so often ? 'Tis not enough to save his vassals from the horrors of poverty, to encourage their marriages, to contribute, as well as he can, to their temporal happiness—he should enlighten them; and it would be strange indeed if the Lord of the Manor did not perform, in the church which he himself builded, what all other pretended *converts* have perform'd in their own way in their own temples."

The Patriarch would have been well advised, either to have chosen some better ground for argument or to have kept silence. The Bishop was a man of energy and character; he had on his side the formidable union of eloquence and faith, the impulse of duty and conviction, against which no sophistry can long prevail. In this peculiar correspondence, Voltaire was clearly defeated. His poor impertinences broke down miserably before the close and well directed fire of the Bishop:

" I could not but be highly surprised that, in affecting not to understand what was clear enough in my letter, you should have supposed me ready to congratulate

you upon a Communion of *policy*, with which *Protestants* have not been less scandaliz'd than *Catholicks*. . . . I have been horrified more than any other man; and, if you were less enlightened, less instructed, I should think it my duty to tell you . . . that, in view of the publick scandal, whether of the writings which are ascribed to you, or of the abstention from almost any act of religion for many years, a Communion . . . required on your part preparatory and signal repentance.

" Without being as learned as you gratuitously suppose me to be, I am learned enough to know that the conduct of a Lord of the Manor who has himself accompanied by armed guards in the very church, and who takes upon himself to harangue the people during the celebration of the Holy Mass, far from being authourized by the usages and the laws of *France*, is, on the contrary, proscribed by the wise ordinances of the Christian kings, who have always made a distinction, both in place and time, between what belongs to the ministry of the Clergy and what belongs to the exercize of the common Law—which you would hand over to the Lords of the Manor."

The Patriarch was not yet crushed. He replied with a long letter, weak in argument, but having passages of considerable eloquence:

" My Lord, your second letter astonishes me even more than the first. I know not what false reports have drawn upon me such bitterness on your part. . . . Literary trifles have nothing to do with the duties of a citizen and a Christian; elegant letters are a mere amusement. Benevolence, a piety solid and without superstition, the love of one's neighbour and resignation

to God, should be the chief concerns of every man who can think seriously. I try, as best I can, to fulfill all these obligations in my retreat, which becomes every day more profound. But since my weakness gives little support to these efforts, I would prostrate myself once more, with you, before the *Divine Providence*, knowing that we bring before *God* but three things which can have no part in his Immensity—our littleness, our faults and our repentance."

The Bishop had the last word: "You know the works which are attributed to you; you know what is thought of you in every part of Europe; you know that nearly all the unbelievers of our age boast of having you for their Chief, and of having derived from your books the principles of their irreligion. . . . If these are calumnies, as you pretend, you must vindicate yourself, undeceive the very publick which now believes them. It is not difficult for one who is a true Christian in heart and spirit to show what he is; he would not think himself permitted to betray his profession by the amusements which you call *literary trifles*. . . . I will leave you, Sir, to judge what it is proper for you to do."

Voltaire could make no direct answer. He had taken up a series of positions which he could not defend against the plain reasoning of the Bishop; he was like a bad chess-player, whose game is lost from the opening. And soon he was to hear of something which made him furious.

The Bishop sent a copy of the correspondence to the King. There could no longer be any doubt, at Versailles, as to the nature of the wicked Patriarch's conversion. The King replied, through his minister

La Vrillière, that the Bishop had done well in exhorting M. de Voltaire to mind his own business, and that M. de Voltaire would be informed that he was not to behave disgracefully in church. The Bishop, though he could have wished for more drastic measures, now printed a neat little duodecimo pamphlet, in which he gave the text of the letters and La Vrillière's reply. It was all very well for the Patriarch to resort, as he so often did, to crazy abuse, to call the Bishop a "fanatical idiot" or the "son of a miserable mason," "a fool," "a monster," and so forth; he was checked, and check-mated, by the Bishop's move.

And now comes another shocking episode, which, together with the one just described, must be taken into account if we would properly understand Voltaire's attitude towards the church, and, above all, the nature of the so-called "recantations" which he made not long before his death.

In Holy Week, 1769, Voltaire summoned to his bedside a Capucin monk, slipped a bright new crown piece into his hand, and demanded absolution. Upon this, the poor father was seized with a violent trembling, protested that he had many people waiting for him in the church, and hurried out of the room, promising to return within three days. Obviously, he had no intention of returning at all.

Voltaire kept to his bed, simulating a fever, and sending his doctor each morning to the curé, with an account of his deplorable condition. Then, as the curé showed little readiness to attend him, he threatened the unhappy man with a report to the Parliament of Geneva, in which he would be indicted with refusing to administer the sacraments to a dying Christian. The curé, seeing himself between the devil and the bishop, fell into a

sad state of physical and mental disorder, tortured alternately by colic and conscience. But there was no help for it. On the 1st of April (and what day could have been more grimly appropriate?) the last act of this atrocious farce was played at Ferney. The Capucin father, timidly proffering a confession of faith, prepared according to the rules, and only waiting for a signature, was bullied by the awful Patriarch into the granting of absolution. The sacraments were administered by the curé, and the lawyer Raffo, called in for the purpose, duly and formally recorded the proceedings.

No sooner were the priests, the lawyer and the attendants out of the room, than the dying man sprang lightly from his bed. "I had some trouble with those fellows," he said to Wagnière, with one of his diabolical grins; "but 'tis all very amusing and very profitable. Let us take a turn in the garden."

In this mixture of policy, buffoonery and sheer devilment, a leading motive was that of revenge on the Bishop of Annecy. Voltaire, while receiving the sacrament, had most impudently "pardoned those who wrote calumnies against him and sent them to the king," and called upon Raffo to witness the declaration. Other motives were less personal. By pretending to observe the rituals of the church and to encourage others to observe them he was disconcerting his enemies by a sudden change of front. It was not so easy to attack a man who, no matter for what reason and in what circumstances, had done precisely what the church required of him. To call him blasphemer and hypocrite was to invite a terrible counter-charge—the charge of intolerance, bigotry and persecution. After all, might he not have been sincere? By doing what he

had done, he placed the righteous in a strange dilemma, and mischievously surrounded himself by a screen of impenetrable cunning. He made no mystery of the affair in writing to his friends. It is enough to quote the following passages from letters to d'Argental:

"My dear angels are all in a fluster about a certain little breakfast [his communion] before a notary; but if they knew that all was done upon the advice of a lawyer who knows the province; if they knew what a fanatical rogue I am dealing with, and in what an awkward position I was placed, they would confess that I did mighty well. One cannot give a greater proof of one's contempt for these farces than by playing them oneself."

And again: "With regard to the *breakfast*, I tell you once more, it was indispensable. I needed a shield to ward off the mortal blows which were aimed at me. . . . By *communicating*, I set a good example to my own tenants and to all my neighbours. . . . The king wishes us to fulfill the duties of a Christian: not only do I acquit myself of my duties, but I send my Catholick servants regularly to the *church*, and my Protestant servants regularly to the *temple*; I engage a schoolmaster to teach the catechism to the children. I have the *History of the Church* and the *Sermons* of Massillon read publicly to me at my meals. I will have no truck with the Imposter of *Annecy*, and I'll drag him openly before the Parliament of Dijon, if he has the audacity to take one step against the laws of the State."

There can be no question of the intention here; nor are we more edified when we see him, in 1770, under letters patent duly granted by the General at Rome,

becoming a father of the Capucin order. A pretty father! Well might he sign himself, as he often did, "*Brother Voltaire, unworthy Capucin.*" But there was no denying the authorisation, and the Bishop of Annecy might say what he pleased.

We may turn now from these disgraceful adventures to more congenial aspects of the Patriarch.

During the later years of his residence at Ferney, much time was devoted to the vindication of young d'Etallonde, and the revision of the sentence on Lally, who had been executed for his failure to hold Pondicherry for the French. In the case of d'Etallonde, he does not appear to have been successful, though he never slackened his efforts; but Lally was rehabilitated, fifteen years after the promulgation of the sentence, and only a few days before the death of his defender. Much time, also, was devoted to the protection of the people of Gex, by preserving them from the depredations of the Farmers General.

And all the while, this extraordinary Patriarch was capering, if he spoke the truth, on the very edge of the tomb. There is hardly a letter in which he does not complain of his maladies, and hardly one which is not signed with some melancholy reminder, such as "the sick old man," "the poor old invalid," "*Le Vieux Malade de Ferney.*" Doctor Burney, who saw him in 1770, said: "It is not easy to conceive it possible for life to subsist in a form so nearly composed of mere skin and bone as that of M. de Voltaire. He complained of decrepitude, and said, he supposed I was curious to form an idea of the figure of one walking after death." And Doctor John Moore, the ingenious author of *Zeluco*, expressed himself in the same style: "The first idea which has presented itself to all who

have attempted a description of his person, is that of a skeleton."

Yet we should observe, that in the whole of this long life of bewildering, incessant activity, of intense mental effort, there was never a period of real illness, apart from the attack of small-pox at Maisons in 1723, when Voltaire was in his twenty-ninth year. Nor was that vigorous mind ever quelled, until the very hour of death. His visitors at Ferney were always in amazement. Some of them were terrified by the alarming, the unaccountable vivacity, the fury and vehemence of this fragile creature. Was he possessed of a devil? How could there be life enough in that poor little body, which looked so dry and brittle, to give to the eyes their piercing brilliance, or to fill the mind with so many inventions?

Two late views of the Patriarch, by two observers essentially unlike each other, may be compared with advantage. The first of these is Madame Suard, a young and handsome woman, who, if a trifle vapid, was no fool. She was at Ferney in 1775, and although her posture is that of a devotee, her very devotion made her greedy of opportunity and gave her the desire to observe and record with the fullest possible detail. From the long accounts which she wrote to her husband, and which she intended only for his perusal, we take the following passages:

"I have at last reached the goal of my journey and my desires: I have seen M. de Voltaire. . . . Ah! how greatly was I astonished when, instead of the decrepit figure I thought to see, I beheld this countenance full of fire and expression; when, instead of an old bent man, I saw one who was upright, noble and

elevated, tho' free, with a carriage firm and even sprightly, and with a tone, a politeness which, like his genius, are uniquely his own ! . . . He spoke much of M. Turgot. 'He has three terrible enemies,' he said: 'financiers, rogues, and the gout.' I told him that one might oppose to them his virtues, his courage, and the esteem of the Publick. 'But, Madam, they tell me you are one of our enemies.' 'Come, Sir ! you will not believe what is wrote to you, but perhaps you will believe me. I am not the enemy of any one. I honour the virtues and the learning of M. Turgot ; but I recognize in M. Necker, also, great virtues and great learning, which I honour equally. . . .' As I pronounced these words in a serious, emphatick tone, M. de Voltaire seem'd to fear he had offended me. 'Come, Madam,' said he with a benevolent air; 'compose yourself. God will bless you, for you know how to love your friends. I am by no means the enemy of M. Necker, but you will forgive me if I prefer M. Turgot. Let's say no more of it.' "

A few days later, Madame Suard wrote one of the most intimate and most engaging accounts of the Patriarch which have been preserved. She had risen early, and was admitted to the bedroom of the great man:

" I sat down by the side of his bed, which is extremely simple and of the most perfect neatness. He was sitting up, straight and steady, like a youth of twenty years; he had a pretty waistcoat of white satin, a nightcap tied on with a very becoming ribbon. He has no other writing table by the side of this bed, where he is continually at work, but a chess table. I was struck

by the order of his cabinet: 'tis not like *yours*, with books all over the place and great piles of paper; all is arrang'd; and he knows so well the places where his books are kept, that, when he wished to consult a *memoir* on the suit of M. de Guines, which we were talking of at the moment—'Wagnière,' said he to his secretary, 'my good Wagnière, prithee take this memoir from the third shelf on the left'—and there it actually was. There was a vast quantity of pens upon his writing table. I begged him to allow me to take one, which I would guard as the most precious of relicks; and he himself aided me in finding one with which he had written the most. He has by the side of his bed the portrait of Madame du Châtelet, whom he remembers with the truest affection. But within his bed-hangings are the two engravings of the Calas family. I still remember the one which represents the wife and children of this victim of Fanatism embracing their father at the moment when he is being led away to the torture. . . . I reproached M. de Voltaire for having placed it so that it was always before his eyes. 'Ah, Madam! for eleven years I was occupied continually with that unhappy family and the family of Sirven; and in all that time, Madam, I reproached myself, as for a crime, whenever I found that I was smiling.'"

On the occasion of another visit, she found that the Patriarch had dressed himself up to receive her. He had put on his best perruque and a magnificent dressing-gown. "See!" cried Madame de Luchet as he came out of his room; "is he not fine? And you, Madam, are the object of this coquetry."

"M. de Voltaire smiled with benevolence, and with a sort of charming confusion at being catch'd in this

little folly. His smile, so full of grace, reminded me of the statue by *Pigalle*, which has preserved some of its character. I told him I had made haste to view the statue and had kiss'd it. 'And it kiss'd you back again, did it not?' cried M. de Voltaire."

Madame Suard observed, as others did, that Voltaire was not always treated with kindness and understanding by his niece, and by those who lived with him. We know, indeed, that Mignot Denis was a hard, stupid, mercenary woman, who regarded her uncle merely as a source of distinction or profit. Her actions after his death are sufficient proof of her aims and character. Nor was Tronchin, the great Theodore, as good a friend as he might have been.

"I observe with pain that the persons around him, and even his niece, have none of those little indulgences to which his age and feebleness properly entitle him. He is often looked upon as a teasy child; as if, at eighty years of age, he might not be expected, after entertaining a company for three hours together, to feel the need of rest—and is it not a very real need? They are scarce ever willing to believe that he suffers; it seems as tho' no one wishes to pity him. This air of unconcern, which struck me very much to-day, has angered me and touched me to the very heart."

From this attitude of sentimental devotion, marked by real sensibility and real insight, we turn to the impressions of Madame de Genlis; a woman of strict morals, rigid orthodoxy, and a less impulsive nature. She disliked Voltaire, and went to see him through mere curiosity, determined to preserve a stately balance and to show, if there was need to, her disapproval of his

teachings. She was accompanied by Mr Ott, a German painter who was returning from Italy.

On their way to the house, they looked with pious horror at Voltaire's church, and the dreadful inscription above the door. Admitted to the antechamber of Ferney, Mr Ott was not slow to perceive a picture hanging in a dark corner. "Correggio!" he cried, with joy if not with discernment. And it was indeed, according to Mr Ott and Madame de Genlis, "a fine original painting of Correggio." Then, with Madame de Genlis maintaining "all the tranquillity of her deportment," they were introduced to the great man. Mr Ott, his head all in a whirl of excitement, produced from his pocket some miniature copies which he had made in Rome, and eagerly handed them to Monsieur de Voltaire. Among them was a picture of the Virgin and Child. Monsieur de Voltaire permitted himself to utter "several impieties," while Madame de Genlis turned away, "extremely shocked," to Monsieur de Voltaire's niece.

Things were no better at dinner. "M. de Voltaire was anything but amiable: he seemed to be always quarrelling with his people, shouting at the top of his voice, with such force that I trembled involuntarily several times; the dining room is very resonant, and his thundering tones rang out in the most terrifying manner. They had warned me of this fashion of his, which is so unseemly before strangers, and one perceives at once 'tis a habit, for his people appeared to be not in the least surprized or troubled." After dinner, they drove out in the *berline* to look at the village of Ferney, and here, at least, was something which Madame de Genlis could admire without injury to her conscience.

"He took us into the village to view the houses he

has built and the benevolent institutions he has promoted. Here he is greater than in his books, for one sees everywhere a thoughtful goodness, and one can scarce believe that the same hand which has wrote such impiety, such wickedness and falsehood, could have made such wise, noble and useful things. He shows his village to all visitors, but with a becoming air; he talks of it simply and frankly; he explains what he has done, but without the least kind of boastfulness."

She gives a vivid picture of the Patriarch himself—a picture full of detail and character, but differing in more than one respect from the inspired portrait of Madame Suard:

"All the portraits and all the *bustos* of M. de Voltaire are of an exact likeness, but no artist has properly represented his eyes: I expected to see them brilliant and full of fire; they are, indeed, the most animated I have seen, but they have, at the same time, something tender and an inexpressible sweetness; the soul of *Zaïre* is all in these eyes; the extreme *malice* of his laugh and smile changes at once this charming expression. He is much bent, and his *Gothick* manner of attiring himself makes him appear even older. He has a sepulchral voice, which gives a singular tone to what he says, the more so as he is in the habit of speaking with excessive loudness, tho' he is not at all deaf. When there is no question of his enemies or of religion, his conversation is simple and natural, with no pretention, and consequently (with such a genius as his) perfectly delightful. It seemed to me that he would not allow any one, upon any subject, to hold an opinion contrary to his own; as soon as he is contradicted, his tone becomes sharp and piercing; he has certainly forgot much of the polite usage which

he ought to possess, and nothing is more easily understood: since he has been in this place, he is only visited by those who intoxicate him with their praises, his decisions are oracles, all his neighbours are at his feet; he hears of nothing save of the admiration which he inspires, and the most ridiculous exaggerations of this kind appear to him as ordinary compliments."

CHAPTER IX

APOTHEOSES

THE tragedy of *Irène* had been accepted by the players of the Comédie in January, 1778, and the rehearsal of this work seemed to Voltaire a favourable occasion for a visit to Paris.

Louis XV had died in 1774, and Louis XVI and his young queen Marie Antoinette were seated upon the precarious throne of France. But the court, fatally adhering to orthodoxy of the most rigorous kind, was not well disposed towards the Patriarch.

A dimly apprehended knowledge of insecurity may even then have stiffened the enmity of Versailles against those who were leading the intellectual revolution. Then, as in other countries at other times, any attack directed against the church could not fail to strike at the principles of monarchy. It is only necessary to add to these considerations the natural hostility which is always excited by men of greatly superior intelligence, in order to understand the attitude of Louis and his courtiers. The queen, it is true, did not conform to this attitude. She, with her dislike of stuffy decorums, and with all the vivacious curiosity of a young woman, would gladly have met Monsieur de Voltaire and listened to his amusing talk. But Louis, dull, saintly man, fumbling with his poor hobbies and blundering amiably among his bewildered ministers, could not hear of Monsieur de Voltaire without exasperation.

Lekain was to have played in *Irène*; but Lekain, with the petulance and caprice of a great actor, suddenly declined. However excusable mere petulance may

be in the irresponsible constitution of an artist, ingratitude is less easily defended, and Lekain, who had been discovered by Voltaire and who owed so much to the friendship of his patron, was acting here in a way which distressed even his fellow players. Voltaire, who might well have been enraged, behaved with dignity and circumspection. He wrote to Lekain expressing his willingness to abide by his decision, yet still hoping that he would play a part in the tragedy. It seemed more than ever desirable to visit Paris.

Voltaire had not set foot in Paris for twenty-eight years—not since the day on which he started for Potsdam. He had a great longing to return, to see his "dear angels," and feel himself in the full tide of intellectual life. He was not formally exiled. The avowed displeasure and insulting coldness of Louis XV, and the solid front of his enemies at Versailles, had deterred him from running the risk of danger or disgrace. Now, so it seemed, he had less to fear. Yet, even while he was contemplating the journey, he felt himself broken in health, and more likely to embark upon "the little voyage of eternity." He had been working with feverish anxiety upon the tragedies of *Irène* and *Agathocles*; he was excited by all the delights and all the terrors of his project. An old man of eighty-four, feeling himself near the end of a long and strenuous life, might well hesitate before facing the discomfort, the perils of a journey at the dreariest season of the year. But his mind was made up (Mignot Denis had no wish to deter him), and on the 4th of February he left Ferney.

Six days later, his travelling coach, heated by a portable stove, reached the barriers of Paris. The customs men asked if there was anything to be declared.

" Faith, gentlemen," said the Patriarch, " I think there is nothing contraband here except myself." Wagnière stepped out of the coach, and one of the guards, having a clearer view of who was inside it, turned with excitement to his comrade: " By the Lord ! 'tis Monsieur de Voltaire." Already the face and form of this great man were familiar to the people of Paris, as the face and form of—let us say —Mr. Bernard Shaw are familiar to the Londoners of the present time. Guards and revenue officers, withdrawing with respect and many comical salutes, begged Monsieur to continue his journey.

It was about half-past three in the afternoon. Voltaire, gay and smiling, rattled away in the merriest manner, so great his joy at seeing once more the busy streets of Paris. He was to stay in the very house in the Rue de Beaune where, in his youth, he had lived with Madame de Bernières, and which now belonged to his friend the Marquis de Villette.

After a cursory glance at his new quarters, he hurried off, walking briskly, to see d'Argental. The " angels " were living not far away, on the Quai d'Orsay.

Nothing could have been more touching than the meeting between these two affectionate old men, these lifelong friends who had been separated now for so many years. At first there was only weeping, embracing, a few halting words, a joyous confusion. Then came the news. Lekain was dead. He had died only two days previously, not long after he had played in a successful revival of *Adélaïde du Guesclin*. That was bad news for Voltaire; he had lost, not only a man of whom he was extremely fond, but the actor he had most desired to see in *Irène*. He did not think of Lekain's ungracious refusal, or of the strange letter he had

received from him not long before leaving Ferney. And the loss was more than personal: Lekain at the Comédie held the same position that Garrick held at Drury Lane; he was by far the most brilliant and most versatile actor of his period.

But no grief could endure for long amid the happy influences that now surrounded him, and Voltaire was soon talking gaily with his visitors. These visitors, indeed, gave him little peace. They came every day to the Rue de Beaune, and were received in the salon by Madame Denis, fat, pretentious and affable, and the young Marquise de Villette—*Belle et Bonne*.

" Monsieur de Voltaire," said Linguet, " has quitted the woods of Ferney which he has sung, the houses of Ferney which he has built, the quiet of Ferney with which he was so well content, for the mud, the noise and the incense of Paris."

All day long the amazing old man, in nightcap and flowered dressing-gown, received the friendly multitudes. He was radiant. He had the elaborate courtesy and studied graces of an earlier period; he spoke with happy allusions, a nimbleness of mind and memory, a kindness which touched the heart, a humour which charmed the imagination. All that was good and lovable, all that was gay and pleasing in this versatile nature, had free play. He seemed to have a renewed youth, a gift of energy rarely seen in so old a man. But, standing a little apart, grim Theodore Tronchin, now installed in Paris—grim Doctor Theodore watched him with professional curiosity. This cannot last for long, thought the Doctor; he is spending his capital instead of living upon his income; and how interesting—yes ! how extremely interesting it will be to observe in what manner he greets the last visitor—death.

The court must have learnt of this popular and social demonstration with a sort of uneasiness. M. de Voltaire was clearly overshadowing every other man in Paris—in France—perhaps in Europe. It was not at all agreeable to see such honours accorded openly to an infidel, and one who had spoken so rudely and roughly about the church and the government of the land. Had he not called his own countrymen *Welches*, barbarians, savages? Why, then, was all Paris hastening to see this detestable creature? "Monsieur de Voltaire?" said the king with affected carelessness: "Monsieur de Voltaire?—ah yes!—he is in Paris, I believe; though not with my approval." But the French populace, so flighty and wayward, has always loved a hero, has always been ready enough to flow with a blind violence of enthusiasm towards a great man, especially towards a man of singular personality, and above all towards a man who has cleverly abused them.

What is more, the shadow of coming changes was already felt by the people; and those who were observant could see it beginning to spread over the whole face of society. Already Versailles was left to its own dreary devices of self-destruction, and even the genius of Turgot had been unable to restore credit. It was not for nothing that people in the street pressed forward to see "the defender of Calas." In their eyes, Calas represented the people themselves; people who were now preparing their own defence, and to whom Voltaire had become a symbol of justice and toleration.

Among the visitors in the Rue de Beaune was the Commissioner from America, that grave and venerable man, Doctor Benjamin Franklin. He came with his grandson, for whom he asked "a blessing." The boy

knelt reverently, and Voltaire, placing his hands on the bowed head, spoke those memorable words: *God and Liberty.* Those words were spoken in English, with a fervour and simplicity so touching that all those who were in the room were profoundly moved.

There were visitors of a less welcome sort. Before he had been many days in Paris, Voltaire received a letter from the Abbé Gaultier. The Abbé, who was a Jesuit, and had been the curé of Saint-Marc in the diocese of Rouen for twenty years, seems to have been a worthy and charitable man. His letter, a little grim at first glance, had evidently been dictated by a kindly spirit:

"Sir, there are many persons who admire you, and I desire with all my heart to be of their number; if you consent, I may have that privilege; it does but depend on you. . . . Although I am the most unworthy of all ministers, I will say nothing unworthy of my ministry and nothing which could be unpleasing to you. And if I dare not flatter myself that you will bestow such happiness upon me, I shall none the less remember you in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and I shall pray the just and merciful God, with all the fervour of which I am capable, for the welfare of your immortal soul, which is perhaps soon to be judg'd for all its actions. Forgive me, Sir, if I take a liberty in writing to you: my intention is to render you the greatest of all services; I may do so with the help of Him, who chooses the weakest to confound those who are most mighty."

Voltaire was not wrong in forming his opinion of the writer:

"Your letter, Sir, appears to me that of an honest man. . . . I am eighty-four years old; I must soon appear before God, Maker of all the Worlds. If you have something to tell me, I shall think it a duty and an honour to receive your visit."

On receiving this answer, Gaultier at once proceeded to the Rue de Beaune.

It is necessary here to remind ourselves that Voltaire was a man of policy. He had no wish to be troubled by the church, and he had no wish to embitter the last days of his life by a violent controversy. He wanted to be left in peace; and to leave others in peace. And there was another reason for his willingness to see the Abbé. He had often expressed the fear that his body might be buried, like that of poor Adrienne Lecouvreur, in waste ground, without the decency of ceremonial and the honour of a tomb. This fear, a little odd in one so philosophic, became more intense as he grew older. And the one way to avoid this ignominy was to die as a Christian. In considering his last dealings with the clergy, these motives have to be taken into account; nor must we forget the ugly farce of the Easter Communions, in which he showed to what length he was prepared to go in matters of strategical conformity.

The Abbé Gaultier was received in a manner almost cordial, and listened to with patience. When he had proved that he came on his own initiative, and not as the result of any move on the part of the Archbishop or of the curé of the parish (Saint-Sulpice), Voltaire appeared to be deeply touched.

"And what did you think of the Abbé, Sir?" asked Wagnière when the visitor had gone. "He is a good-natur'd old imbecile," replied the grinning Patriarch.

On the day following this interview with Gaultier there came to the Rue de Beaune a visitor of a more congenial kind—indeed, none could have been more congenial—old Madame du Deffand.

By the end of the month, the strain of all this excitement, as Tronchin had anticipated, began to take effect. On the 25th there was a violent spitting of blood, followed by a state of extreme lassitude. A very experienced young woman was called in to nurse the sick man, to see that the doctor's instructions were carried out, and to shut the door in the face of importunate visitors. On the 2nd of March, Voltaire, lying extenuated upon his bed, received the Abbé Gaultier and told him that he desired to make his confession. Wagnière's comic anxiety that his master should not "dishonour" himself was somewhat out of place, and when he was questioned as to the cause of his agitation he "could find no answer." Voltaire and Gaultier were left alone in the room, and in a little while Voltaire called for paper, pen and ink.

What had taken place between the two men? We cannot say; we have only the evidence of the strange document to which Voltaire now set his hand, and that document is not an orthodox confession of faith. Such as it is, it should be read with attention, for it is on the evidence of this alleged "recantation," and on this alone, that we are asked to believe in the sincerity of Voltaire's repentance and the intensity of his desire to be received again into the church.

"I, the undersigned, declare that, having suffered from a spitting of blood for four months, at the age of eighty-four years, and having been unable to drag myself to the church, and the curé of Saint-Sulpice having willingly added to his good works that of sending

to me the Abbé Gaultier, priest, I have confess'd to him, and that, if God will dispose of me, I die in the Catholick religion in which I was born, hoping the Divine Mercy will deign to pardon all my faults, and that if ever I have scandalized the church I seek the pardon of the church and of God.—Signed VOLTAIRE, the second of March, 1778, in the house of Monsieur le Marquis de Villette."

Now, Gaultier knew well enough that this was not a retraction, or a confession of faith, in accordance with the forms of the church: and if he dictated it, as he is supposed to have done, he could only have regarded it as a preliminary measure. When the Abbé Mignot (Voltaire's nephew) and de Villeveille were called into the room, Gaultier was therefore expressing himself truly in saying "Here is a little declaration which has no great meaning." It was, moreover, written entirely by the hand of Voltaire.

Only two days before, the Patriarch had signed his true profession; a statement in which it seems to us that the whole character of the old man is nobly revealed:

"I die adoring God, loving my friends, not hating my enemies, and detesting superstition."

There can be no reason for refusing to believe that Voltaire was perfectly sincere when he wrote those words, conforming as they do to the essential ideas of his philosophy, if not to his invariable practice. There was never the slightest doubt as to what he understood by superstition.

On the other hand, there are many reasons, as we have tried to show, for believing that the Gaultier document was merely a declaration of policy. Nor can it be urged that, when he saw Gaultier, the fear of

imminent death was upon him. It seems far otherwise, for he was then recovering from his collapse, and the fact that he wrote the document with his own hand proves the degree of recovery. When he was afterwards reproached or taunted by his friends for having made so great a concession to the church, he replied airily that he had done so in order " to get a little peace." That was not a full explanation, because, as we have seen, he was anxious to secure a decent burial, but it probably explains his attitude towards the clergy of Paris. Observe, there was no question of receiving the sacraments ; and there could have been no such question without the preliminaries of true confession and absolution. Clearly, neither confession nor absolution had taken place. And if any doubt existed, that doubt was finally removed by the last efforts of the church to obtain a death-bed confession, and by the action of the Archbishop of Paris in refusing to allow the rites of Christian burial. This refusal was only justified on the ground that Voltaire was not, at the time of his death, a member of the Catholic church.

The whole position was admirably summarised by Madame du Deffand in a letter to Horace Walpole. Walpole had been told of the alleged retraction, and took it for a sign of weakness. Madame du Deffand corrected him with some asperity:

" You have a great and good intelligence, but it does not always preserve you from certain errours of judgement; I know this by experience, and I see it now in the case of Voltaire. You do not properly judge the motives of his behaviour. He would be mightily vexed if any one thought he had changed his way of thinking; and all that he has done, has been

done for the sake of *decorum*, and in order that he might be left in *peace*." And if any one had a right to know, Madame du Deffand certainly had that right.

Soon after the interview with Gaultier, Voltaire's health improved greatly; he was able to see his friends again, and to take a hand in preparing *Irène* for the stage. But he was still kept in bed, and when, on the 10th of March, the players assembled in the salon of Monsieur de Villette for a full rehearsal, Tronchin would not allow him to see them. Perhaps that was just as well, for the Patriarch treated the actors, even the great Vestris, with little regard for their feelings. No ! no ! Madam, he would cry; you are too calm; it will never do ! And then, raising his voice and waving his lean arms, the old man would stamp and rant, run here and there, now explaining and now declaiming, until they all expected to see him fall dead.

Irène was first played on the 14th of March. No first night had ever caused so much excitement, and seldom before had such a great and brilliant concourse filled the theatre. For the first time since his return to Paris, the court showed a friendly disposition towards Voltaire. There, in the royal box, was the queen, Marie Antoinette, the Duke and Duchess of Bourbon and the Count of Artois. And as the play went on, it was observed that the queen took a pencil and quickly wrote down the lines which pleased her.

The king stayed at home. He, indeed, showed no friendly disposition; there he sat in his palace, all dumb and cloudy like a man foredoomed. Perhaps he had made a stiff yet gentle remonstrance as he saw the young queen, in all the superb abundance of her beauty and all the bravery of dress and jewels, set out for the theatre. He had certainly refused to allow the re-

ception of Monsieur de Voltaire at Versailles. How could he approve of a man whose teachings were so subversive and so disloyal ?

After the third act, a messenger hurried from the Comédie to the Rue de Beaune. The play was going very well; it was, indeed, already a triumph. Other messengers followed after the third and fourth acts. And when the last act was over, and the sound of tumultuous applause rose in the theatre, Monsieur Dupuits forced a passage through the crowd and ran to congratulate the author. Other friends made their way to the bedside, and the old man, smiling and delighted, asked them innumerable questions. Which lines, which sentiments had been the most applauded ? Those, to be sure, in which he was clearly attacking the clergy. Ah ! that was good: people would know what to think when they heard those ridiculous stories about his confession. *Irène* was not only a triumph; it was an affirmation of principle.

Monday, the 30th of March, was probably the happiest, and certainly the most triumphant, day of his life. It was the day of apotheosis. Voltaire seemed to have cheated the grave as he had cheated the church; he was weak, it is true, and more than ever like a skeleton; but Tronchin was more hopeful, and told him that he might safely venture to leave the house.

In the evening, the sixth representation of *Irène* was to take place at the Comédie. Voltaire had decided to be present, and before going to the theatre he would attend the special meeting of the Academy.

It was quickly known that Monsieur de Voltaire would drive in his coach from the Rue de Beaune to the Academy, and as the day was fine, though cold,

the streets were soon filled with masses of excitable, happy and curious people. The coachman had no small difficulty in making his way through the cheering multitudes. In the courtyard of the Louvre there were at least two thousand people, all shouting *Vive Monsieur de Voltaire !* and clapping their hands.

To many of those who thus applauded, the old man in the coach was the author of *Candide* and the *Philosophick Dictionary*; to others, he was the great dramatist who, for nearly half a century, had kept alive the great traditions of the French theatre; but to most of them, and perhaps to those who cheered loudest, he was the brave defender of the Calas family, of the Sirvens and La Barre.

The Academy, departing from its ordinary customs (a thing most unusual with academies), paid him extraordinary honours. All the members attended him in the great hall: "an honour never before accorded to any of its members, or even to foreign princes." The clerical members were absent—and was not that, in itself, an honour? Voltaire was given the chair of the director, and was unanimously elected to his office, although such election was generally decided by lot. D'Alembert then proceeded to read to the assembly his *Elegy upon Despréaux*, in which he placed the author of *Merope* and the *Henriade* by the side of Boileau and Racine, and finally compared the style and character of the three great masters of French verse—Despréaux, Racine and Voltaire. He finished the discourse by a series of ingenious comparisons in which, however, there may seem to our modern taste an element of absurdity. "In conclusion," he said, "may we not add, in seeking among the masterpieces of the fine arts for an object serving us for a comparison

between these three great writers, that the style of Despréaux, firm, correct and nervous, is well represented by the fine statue of the *Gladiator*; that of Racine, also correct, but softer and more rounded, by the *Venus de Medicis*; and that of Voltaire, supple, easy and ever noble, by the *Apollo Belvedere*?"

As for Voltaire, his eyes moist with delight and gratitude, he found it no easy matter to maintain the austere calm which was proper in such a man and in such a place. All the members rose and followed him to the outer hall—another unprecedented mark of distinction—and he entered his coach again to drive to the Comédie.

By this time, the crowds in the streets had become denser, and their enthusiasm had risen to an even higher pitch. Boys climbed upon the cornices of buildings, upon pillars and boundary stones, and every place from which they could get a view. People were even clambering upon the roofs of the houses, and seeking perilous perches on ladders and scaffolds. Persons of all ranks and ages took part in this ovation. Shouting and pushing with all the others, the powder knocked out of their wigs, and hats knocked awry on their heads, young noblemen waved their tasselled canes and cried loudly *Vive Voltaire!*

At the door of the theatre, it was necessary to protect the old man from the friendly violence of the crowd. No sooner had the coach come to a standstill than people climbed on the wheels, on the box, on every part that offered a footing or a holding, pushing their hands inside, to feel, if they could not see, Monsieur de Voltaire himself. Some one seized the hand of the Marquise de Villette, who was in the coach, and kissed it reverently, believing it to be the hand of the Patriarch.

With difficulty, Voltaire reached the vestibule. Women ran up, in a frenzy of excitement, to see the great man, to pull little tufts of fur out of his cloak (the gift of royal Catherine), to look closely at the old face, not diabolical now, but radiant with a simple joy, and perhaps a little frightened.

When it was known in the theatre that he had entered the box of the King's Gentlemen, and was hiding himself behind Madame Denis and *Belle et Bonne*, there was no stilling the uproar. The parterre claimed him. And when he appeared in the front of the box, between his niece and the marquise, the uproar was even greater. A new cry arose: The crown ! the crown!

On this, the actor Brizard entered the box and placed on the Patriarch's head, on the huge perruque with its grey bows, a wreath of laurel. " Ah ! " cried the old man; " you will make me die with all this glory!" And he took the wreath from his head and placed it in the fair hands of *Belle et Bonne*. New clamours, new insistence. The marquise tried in vain, all blushing and smiling, to put the crown back on the head of the delightfully obstinate Monsieur de Voltaire. This pretty play was ended by the Prince de Beauvau, who took the wreath and planted it respectfully but firmly on the grey perruque, while the cheering house gave token of its approval.

With the whole theatre full of the dust stirred by moving feet, full of cries and excitement, people kneeling, standing, crowding and talking together, fashionable ladies going down to the pit to have a better view, all the players ranged before the curtain, all the corridors blocked, it seemed as though the play could never begin. And when at last it did begin, no one

paid the least attention to it. Voltaire, perhaps, had come to see the play, but all the people had come to see Voltaire. No one looked at the players, no one listened to the lines; but never was a play more furiously applauded.

When the curtain fell at the end of the last act, it did but mark the beginning of a loud and long ovation. It was impossible for any one to leave the theatre, nor did any one seem anxious to go.

Then the curtain rose again upon a most surprising scene.

One of the players, Mademoiselle La Chassaigne, had remembered how, six years before, there had been a little private apotheosis of Voltaire at Mademoiselle Clairon's rooms in the Rue du Bac. The bust of the poet had been saluted by a chosen company of friends, and verses had been recited in his honour. Was not this the occasion for a grander apotheosis, and one of a more public kind? That was a fine idea, said the players; and by thus rendering homage to Voltaire they would express their own gratitude to the man who had done so much for them, and whose name had become one of the chief glories of the Comédie.

The bust of Voltaire was already standing in the foyer. Some burly fellows took the bust, pedestal and all, and set it down in the centre of the stage. It was a happy improvisation. The whole cast, with palms and garlands in their hands, ranged themselves in a semicircle round the bust; while behind them were the shifters and carpenters, all the humble folk of the theatre, who had assisted in the representation. When all this had been arranged (and it was only the work of a few moments), the curtain was hauled up, and the spectacle was greeted with sounds of indescribable enthusiasm.

In all the history of the theatre we have no record of a scene more extraordinary, more happily conceived, more touching.

First Brizard, still in the monk's dress in which he had played the part of *Léonce*, placed his wreath upon the bust. Then, amid a clamour of voices and the sounding of all the drums and trumpets in the orchestra, the other players followed his example. And as the bust could not support so many crowns, they were slung gaily over the bayonets of the stage guard, who improvised a triumphal arch.

Once more the old man had hidden away, but now he was called for by such a thunder of voices that he was obliged to show himself. There he stood, tears running from his eyes. It was all too much for him. And now Madame Vestris, advancing to the front of the stage with a paper in her hand, read aloud some verses which had just been composed, on the instant, by the Marquis de Saint-Marc. The verses were not good, but everything was good on that night of glory; the fine voice of Madame Vestris made them seem admirable indeed; and soon a hundred copies, industriously made (goodness knows by whom) were circulated among the audience.

After this, the curtain was lowered, and then raised again for a performance of Voltaire's comedy of *Nanine*. The bust had not been taken away, and there it stood in the middle of the stage while the actors played round it—another happy effect of improvisation which must have been exceedingly striking. Before the end of the play, it was seen that the Count of Artois, who had been at the Opera with the queen, was in his box. He arrived just in time to send the captain of his guards to Voltaire, with a message of royal congratulation.

The last scenes of this amazing night are well described by Grimm, a man not readily transported by enthusiasm, who was himself a witness of what took place:

" The moment when M. de Voltaire left the theatre seemed even more touching than that of his arrival; he looked as if broken beneath the weight of his years and of the laurels heaped upon his head. He appeared extremely moved; his eyes were still sparkling in the pallor of his countenance; but it seemed to us as tho' he was kept alive only by the sentiment of his *glory*. All the women stood waiting for him, both in the corridors and upon the staircase; they bore him along, as it were, in their arms, and 'tis thus he arrived at the steps of his coach. He was kept back, as long as possible, at the doors of the Comédie. The people cried out: *Torches, torches ! Let us have a good look at him !* Once he was in his coach, the crowd pressed all around him; people got up on the step and clung to the doors of the coach in order to kiss his hands. Some of the common people began to shout: *'Tis he who wrote Oedipus, Merope, Zaïre; 'tis he who has sung of our good king, etc.* They begged the coachman to walk his horses, so that they might follow him, and a great number of persons accompanied him thus, crying out *Vive Voltaire !* as far as the Pont-Royal."

Among those who thus followed the coach there must have been many who, fifteen years later, followed, with acclamations of another kind, the grim carriages which took so many of those who had been among that gay audience to their death on a bloody scaffold. In those days, men thought again of Voltaire and again honoured him, not as the man who " had written *Merope* and sung of our good king, etc.," but as the man

who had fought the Infamous and avenged the memory of Calas and Sirven.

When he found himself back in the Rue de Beaune, the old man gave way to a flood of tears. So much happiness, so much glory and excitement in one day was too much for his endurance. Yet he was able, the next day, to see a multitude of friends and to busy himself with the ordinary concerns of his life.

It is probable that he had now made up his mind to return to Ferney; but Madame Denis, that vain and selfish woman, would hear of no such thing. Why should they go back to the desolate Jura slopes, when they might so well stay among the delights of Paris ?

Madame Denis, the niece of the great man, was giving herself prodigious airs; she was meeting the aristocracy, and playing a part which (in her own view) suited her to perfection. She had no affection for her uncle, as we have said already, and although we will not suppose that she desired his death, she could certainly anticipate that death without misgivings. By the terms of Voltaire's will, Madame Denis was the "universal inheritor"—or, as we should now say, the residuary legatee—and as there were only a few special legacies, practically the whole of the estate became her own.

It was certainly in accordance with her suggestion that Voltaire began to look for a house in Paris. On the 27th of April he acquired a mansion belonging to M. de Villarceaux, to be leased for life in his name and that of Madame Denis, but he did not live to occupy his new residence.

In the meantime, recovered from his fatigue, he seemed surprisingly well. He went about freely, and wherever he went, he was still the hero of the people.

" He is followed in the streets by the common folk," wrote Madame du Deffand to Walpole, " who call him *l'homme aux Calas*. 'Tis only the court which abstains from enthusiasm. He is eighty-four years old, and in truth I believe he is immortal; he rejoices in all his senses, not one of which is weakened; 'tis a very singular creature, and one who is indeed very superiour to others."

There can be little doubt that, if he had not left Ferney, he might have lived for many more years. As it was, the strain, the varying excitements of his life in Paris could have but one result. He was, in Tronchin's phrase, " living upon his capital," and before long the capital was exhausted.

Exactly one week after the apotheosis at the Comédie, Voltaire was the recipient of a new and peculiar honour. He was invited by the Freemasons of Paris to a meeting at the lodge of the Nine Sisters. Here, without preliminaries, he was made a brother of the order. Only those who are themselves Masons can be aware of the scope and value of this tremendous privilege. We can only repeat reverently how the " brethren of the columns of Euterpe, Terpsichore and Erato " executed " the first part of the third symphony for grand orchestra by Guenin " ; how brother Chic led the second fiddles; how the newly elected brother Voltaire " after having received the signs, words and touchings," was placed in the Orient (whatever that may mean); and how a brother of the column of Melpomene placed on the head of brother Voltaire a crown of laurels, which he quickly removed. After that, the Venerable Lalande tied round the waist of brother Voltaire the apron of brother Helvetius, given to the lodge by the widow of that illustrious man, and brother Voltaire kissed the apron before receiving it. When he was presented

with a pair of woman's gloves, as ritual prescribed, he handed them to brother Marquis de Villette, saying prettily: "As these are the signs of a tender, honest and deserved affection, I beg you to give them to *Belle et Bonne.*"

There followed a series of congratulatory and flattering speeches, while brother Monet, painter to the king, was stealthily employed with his pencil and drew a clever likeness of the Patriarch. Then the orchestra renewed the symphony and the brethren moved into the banqueting hall. After the toasts had been drunk, brother Voltaire asked permission to retire; he was escorted to the door by the greater number of the brethren, and there he was awaited by the usual cheering crowd.

Having dined at home, he showed himself to the people, as a king might have done, on the balcony of the house, between the Count d'Argental and M. de Thibouville. Indeed, there were many who spoke now, some with affection and some with irony, of *le roi Voltaire*—King Voltaire.

The day of the Nine Sisters was concluded by a visit to the house of Madame de Montesson, the secretly married wife of the Duke of Orleans. Of all the royal princes, d'Orleans was the only one with a real taste for letters, philosophy and the drama. He was delighted to receive the man of whom all Paris was now talking, and the warm sincerity of his welcome may have atoned in some measure for the official attitude of the court.

The last great literary work in which Voltaire was concerned was the new dictionary of the Academy. He had been for a long while persuaded of the need

for this dictionary, and on the 7th of May he presented to the Academy a comprehensive plan for the work, which, after discussion, was finally approved.

For more than a week he applied himself with all his energy, with an unlicensed degree of energy, to the preliminaries of this formidable undertaking. He stimulated or refreshed himself by drinking innumerable cups of coffee; but he was now drawing too largely upon his capital, and nature could allow no further advances. The renal disease from which he had been suffering for a considerable time began to gain ground, and there were ugly signs of inflammation and of functional derangement. At the same time, a senile disorder of the prostate became only too apparent, and soon Tronchin was shaking his professional head, and again wondering, in his cool and cruel fashion, how this curious patient would meet his death.

But he was not dead yet; he was, on the contrary, extraordinarily active, and still enjoying his days of triumph and his minor apotheoses.

One evening he had gone to see *Alzire* played. He had gone incognito—as though he could escape recognition !—and was in the box of Madame Hébert. He had determined to be good and quiet, but he had never in his life been able to watch a play without forgetting himself and letting loose some ejaculation of anger, contempt, or approval. At the end of the fourth act he betrayed his presence. Delighted by the fine acting of Larive, he sprang up with gleaming eyes and cried out: "Admirable !" Every one in the theatre turned towards the box, and M. de Voltaire was acclaimed with frenzied enthusiasm. All through the entr'acte it was one continuous demonstration of joy, and when the curtain rose for the fifth act, and

Madame Vestris tried to carry on the performance, she could not make herself heard.

Voltaire, who could not make himself heard any better, thanked the audience by his gestures; and with other gestures pleaded for silence. The play started again, but the people could not restrain their excitement, and soon the clapping and calling were as loud as ever. No matter: the act proceeded, and we are assured that it had a prodigious effect, and was never played more magnificently or seen with greater appreciation. And as he was about to leave the theatre, Voltaire was respectfully accosted by "an officer in the regiment of the Orleans Infantry," who handed him a copy of four impromptu verses. The verses compared the author of *Alzire* to the sun in the firmament, and the people in the pit to a company of worshipping Incas: a compliment to which the author quickly and happily replied by a parody of two of his own lines.

Another emotional scene took place at a meeting of the Academy of Sciences. Voltaire was not a member of that Academy, and he attended the meeting as a guest, but he could not prevent it from being known that he intended to be present, and the hall was filled with pretty, excited women, elegant young men, writers, philosophers and critics.

The fellows of the Academy insisted on Voltaire taking his place among them. Here he met the "foreign associate," Benjamin Franklin, and again the two old men fell into each other's arms, while the whole assembly cheered and stamped and shouted in a long delirium of hero-worship.

D'Alembert proceeded to read the elegy of a deceased member, written by Condorcet, who was himself unable to attend the meeting. Ingenious allusions to Voltaire

were cleverly interpolated, and these allusions were not lost upon the responsive audience.

The occasion was not a happy one for poor M. Macquer, who now had to read his paper on *How to make out of imperfectly ripen'd Grapes a Wine quite free from any Trace of Sourness*. It may have been a very excellent and interesting paper, but the people in the hall were not disposed to listen with the full attention it properly deserved. They had not come in order to learn what to do with imperfectly ripened grapes. Nor were they more disposed to hear two more dull elegies by Condorcet.

We need not suppose that the homage of the Academy of Sciences was of a purely fortuitous description, and a mere reflection of the popular mood. It was the Academy which had printed Voltaire's *Essay on Fire*, and which had approved of his work on *The Principles of Newton*. Voltaire, if he was never more than a distinguished amateur in the sciences, was a man of recognised scientific ability; and we may note that he had been elected a fellow of our own Royal Society in 1743.

At the beginning of May, Voltaire was rapidly declining, and by the middle of the month it was clear that he had not much longer to live. At last the grand energies were failing and the busy mind was dark and troubled. He was unable to attend a meeting of the Academy on the 11th, though he was still occupied with the plan of the dictionary and still able to discuss matters with his friends. He kept his brain stimulated by incessant draughts of coffee, and he dulled the pains of his body, as best he could, by doses of laudanum. After the 18th he seems to have been too unwell for sustained intellectual work. His last verses, gay and

full of spirit, were written on the 16th for the old Abbé L'Attaignant, one of the ancient revellers of the Temple. There are two short undated notes, written, as Bauchot so pathetically observes, " in a trembling hand," which were sent to Doctor Tronchin, probably about the 24th or 25th.

" Your old patient has the fever. The legs of his glorious body are much swollen and covered with red patches. This morning, he wished to transport himself to the Temple of Aesculapius; he could not do so."

And the later of the two:

" The patient of the Rue de Beaune has suffered all night, and still suffers, from a violent convulsive cough. He has spat blood three times. He begs pardon for giving so much trouble over a mere carcase."

To this note there was fastened by two wafers a dirty playing card, on which he had written:

" *Non cecedit. Panem mitto. Non in solo pane vivit homo, sed in omni verbo quod oritur ex ore Tronchin.*"

Last of all, dated the 26th of May, and gloriously concluding his immense and vigorous correspondence, is a note written in his own hand to the Count de Lally. The verdict of the parliament which had condemned Lally's father to death had just been rescinded, and Voltaire was thus assured of a final victory over the Infamous. No news could have been more grateful to him.

" The dying man," he wrote, " comes back to life on hearing this great news; he tenderly embraces M. de Lally; he sees that the king is the defender of justice; he will die content."

When he spoke of " coming back to life," he spoke truly. He had been lying in bed for many days, with hardly a word, hardly a movement. The news of Lally's

vindication, the triumph of his last and not least glorious cause, filled him with a noble, invigorating joy.

Not content with writing his note to Lally, he had a little placard written out and pinned to his bed-curtain: "On the 16th of May, the juridical murder committed by Pasquier on the person of Lally has been avenged by the King's Council." Now, indeed, might the weary soldier die content, with a sound of victory in his ears.

We have no wish to pry with unwholesome curiosity into the circumstances of his death. Nor is it possible to depend with complete reliance upon any account of these circumstances. The enemies of the old man would have us believe that he faced death with a hideous terror, with agony unspeakable and with a dreadful violence of word and action. Such an end would have allowed the church to point a warning moral, and to exhibit the last moments of the mocker with a grim satisfaction. There were many churchmen to whom that satisfaction would have given the most acute pleasure. On the other hand, his friends, and those who were actually present (with the exception of Tronchin, who was unaccountably spiteful) would have us believe the exact opposite. One thing, at least, is abundantly clear: there was no final "recantation," no ceremony of penitence, and no acceptance of the Catholic discipline. Gaultier, who presented himself almost daily in the Rue de Beaune, had been refused admittance, and when, on the day of Voltaire's death, the 30th of May, he arrived with de Tersac, the curé of Saint-Sulpice, he was not successful in obtaining any addition to the "profession of faith" which he had secured in March. We are inclined to believe, after the most complete investigation which is now possible,

that Voltaire died peacefully. In this, we agree with Desnoiresterres; and we do not see how it could have been otherwise. After the flicker of animation on the 26th, Voltaire had sunk almost to the level of unconsciousness. His frail body was exhausted; his mind and senses were mercifully numbed by copious doses of laudanum.

The story of the last efforts of the church, represented by Gaultier and de Tersac, is well known, and may be taken as authentic in substance. It should be noted, in La Harpe's account, that there was some difficulty in making Voltaire understand that these men desired to see him, and that, when he knew they were waiting outside the door, he murmured faintly but inconsequently: "Assure them of my respects."

De Tersac, a loud, arrogant, stupid man, entirely without gentleness or decorum, approached the bedside with a sort of desperate importunity: "Monsieur de Voltaire, you have reached the end of your life; do you acknowledge the divinity of Jesus Christ?" At this, Voltaire, turning wearily towards him, replied: "*Leave me to die in peace.*"

Various accounts add other words, and describe various gestures; but these words—"Leave me to die in peace"—are cited independently, and there seems good reason to believe they were actually spoken.

"Ah!" said de Tersac, with a movement of exasperation: "you see, he has lost his senses." And the two priests left the room.

This interview took place between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, and at eleven o'clock Voltaire died.

No account which can bear the test of close examination has any details to add to the above. The horrible

particulars which are given in such documents as the anonymous *Enquiry* published for the first time in 1908 by Lachèvre are entirely unconvincing, and in nearly every case the documents provide internal evidence both of prejudice and of falsity.

Was there, in those last moments, a struggle between pride and fear? We cannot say, and there can be little interest in knowing. The Marquise de Villette, *Belle et Bonne*, who seldom left the sick man's room, and was present at the moment of his death, told Lady Morgan that he died placidly. "To the very last moment," she said, "everything showed the goodness and benevolence of his character, everything bespoke tranquillity, peace and resignation, except the little movement of impatience which he exhibited towards the curé of Saint-Sulpice, when he begged him to retire, and said, *Leave me to die in peace.*"

The Archbishop of Paris, to the shame and scandal of those (and they were the most numerous) who believed Voltaire the greatest man in France, refused burial in consecrated ground. This refusal must have been known in some way, or at least anticipated, almost immediately after Voltaire's death, for the body was hastily embalmed during the night and conveyed in a travelling coach the next day to the Abbey of Scellières. Here, through the offices of the Abbé Mignot, it was buried with the rites of the church. The heart of Voltaire was placed in a casket and given to the Marquis de Villette.

In 1791, when so many castles of the Infamous had been taken by storm, with the king a prisoner in the Tuileries and the Bastille an empty shell, the body

of Voltaire was brought back to Paris for a new triumph.

A decree of the National Assembly, dated the 8th of May, 1791, ordered the removal of the body from the Abbey of Scellières to the parish church of Romilly. On the 30th of May, there was another decree:

"The National Assembly, having listened to the report of the Committee of the Constitution, decrees that Marie-François Arouet de Voltaire is worthy to receive the honours accorded to great men; and that, in consequence, his ashes are to be transferred from the church of Romilly to that of Saint-Geneviève in Paris."

Charron, the master of the pageant, went to Romilly to escort the body to Paris; and in Paris, meanwhile, the Marquis de Villette and *Belle et Bonne*, the friends of Voltaire, were to make ready for his reception. At ten o'clock on the evening of the 10th of July, the funeral convoy reached Paris. On the following day, the body was taken in state to the Panthéon.

The king and queen, poor souls, after the inglorious flight to Varennes, and now guarded by an angry populace, must have heard of this new triumph with bitterness and dismay. Louis had refused to meet Voltaire; and now Louis was a king without a crown, a king with powerless hands; while Voltaire, a dead man, was moving with royal honours to his resting-place. If anything could have made yet more dreadful the dreadful loneliness of that poor king, it was the tribute now paid to the man he so cordially detested.

On the evening of the 10th the body of Voltaire had been received in Paris by the municipal officials, and placed upon "a carriage of antique form." Accompanied by deputations from the National Guard and from the patriot clubs, the carriage had been driven

to the ruins of the Bastille. Here, a platform had been prepared on the emplacement of the very tower in which young Arouet had been imprisoned in 1717. The tower was a pile of blackened stones, and grass was already growing over the tumbled masonry of the prison. As the coffin was placed on the platform, surely the most symbolic of all halting-places, a silence fell upon the people. Looking upon a great heap of the old stones of the Bastille, men could read a new, inspiring device, engraved in large letters on the face of a block:

"Receive, in this place where Despotism enchained thee, Voltaire, the Honours of thy Fatherland."

The morning of Monday, the 11th of July, 1791, had been showery, and there had been some thought of postponing the ceremony of the Panthéon; but it seemed better not to disappoint the people, and especially the good citizens of Varennes who had escorted the fugitive king to Paris, and who were anxious to witness the triumph of the Citizen Voltaire. At two o'clock in the afternoon the procession started from the Bastille.

First came a cavalry detachment with trumpets, and then the cannoneers, the sappers and drummers, and a whole battalion of children—the young cadets of the National Guard. Then followed a company of students and patriot deputies with their gay banners. After these came the grim legion of the Halle, ferocious, haggard men carrying pike or musket, marching under their ominous device:

> "Great gods, exterminate throughout our land
> Those who with pleasure spill the blood of men."

Next came large medallion portraits of Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mirabeau and Désilles, grouped

round the bust of Mirabeau presented by citizen Palloy to the commune of Argenteuil. With these marched the men of Varennes, and the provincial comrades of Nancy and Arras. Workmen who had been engaged in the demolition of the Bastille carried the chains, irons and cannon-balls taken from the wrecked prison. Then came the citizens of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, with their great model of the Bastille, accompanied by an Amazon, dressed in the uniform of the National Guard, who had taken part in the storming of the fortress. These terrible citizens carried pikes with caps of liberty stuck upon them. Behind the electors of 1789 and 1790, the members of the Jacobin club and the Swiss Guardsmen, came a golden statue of Voltaire, crowned by laurels, and carried by sturdy fellows dressed "in the antique manner." Round the statue were pyramids bearing medallions with the titles of his books. Academicians and men of letters walked on either side of a golden casket which held the seventy volumes of the collected works, given by Beauharnais. They were followed by choirs and bands of music, by young painters and poets, municipal officers and more guardsmen.

The funeral car bearing the sarcophagus which held the body of Voltaire was drawn by twelve magnificent grey horses, four abreast, led by men attired as ancient Greeks or Romans. Two of these horses, we are told, had been provided by the queen, Marie Antoinette.

Unhappy queen! Did the king know of this gift from the royal stables? did he acquiesce in this forlorn and touching gesture of regard? The whole ceremony, if we accept the word of Grégoire, was designed less to honour Voltaire than to express contempt for religion; and if that was so, it is hard to believe that Louis,

that saintly person, could have agreed to such a strange mark of royal favour.

Above the sarcophagus was a bier on which reposed a marble effigy of Voltaire (the masterpiece of Houdon) with a broken lyre by his side, and the figure of Renown bending over him. Upon the sarcophagus itself was the inscription:

He avenged Calas, La Barre, Sirven and Montbailly. Poet, historian, philosopher, he has trained the human mind to lofty flights, and has prepared us for Freedom.

The wheels of the funeral car were of massive bronze. "Those are fine wheels, citizen," said one in the crowd. "Aye, citizen," replied his fellow; "they are crushing fanatism."

The car was followed by a deputation from the National Assembly, members of the law courts, and the high municipal officers of Paris, with Mayor Bailly at their head—the Mayor bowing politely, and seeming to acknowledge the great bursts of applause. After these came the battalion of veterans, and another squadron of cavalry.

First, the cortège halted at the Opera. The bust of Voltaire had been placed in front of the building, surrounded by garlands; and here the actors placed a wreath on the bust, while the pupils of the Academy of Music chanted a hymn.

Then the procession passed the long front of the Tuileries. The people of the royal household were crowding at the windows; but the shutters were closed over one of these windows, and behind the shutters, looking out through the narrow slits, were the king and queen. It must have been a cruel moment for those

two unhappy prisoners, guarded in their own palace, and watching the triumphal progress of democracy and reason. What thoughts were in the mind of the queen as she saw her two grey horses? What thoughts were in the poor, stupid head of the king as he listened to the roaring of the multitude? Many there were, no doubt, who glanced up at the shuttered window with fierce hatred or with galling contempt, for there was little compassion now in the hearts of the people. That piteous flight to Varennes, a last act of misery and weakness, had destroyed, once and for all, every lingering trace of loyalty and every spark of affection. There is no mercy for a king who runs away.

So the procession moved across the Pont-Royal and halted again before the house in the Rue de Beaune, the house of the Marquis de Villette. In front of the façade, four tall poplar trees were planted, with long festoons of oak-leaves twined about them. On the front of the house was this inscription:

His Spirit roams the World, his Heart is here.

A great company of young girls in white, with crowns of roses on their heads and blue sashes round their waists, charmingly represented the new tricolour. And there, standing with the Marquis and Marquise de Villette, were the ladies of the Calas family.

A woman in the crowd, looking up and reading the inscription, asked what it could mean. "Why," said her neighbour, "do you not know? His heart—'tis Madame de Villette."

When the catafalque had been drawn up at the appointed place, the Marquise, Voltaire's beloved *Belle et Bonne*, placed a wreath on the head of the effigy;

and then, taking by the hand her little daughter, she appeared to dedicate the child "to reason, philosophy and liberty."

The choirs now sang hymns of triumph; *Belle et Bonne* and the daughters of Madame Calas took their place behind the funeral car; and the procession moved on again.

There was another halt outside the Comédie, another scene of triumph, with Rameau's chorus from *Samson*:

> "People, awake and break thy chains,
> For Liberty is calling.
> Proud people, thou art born for her;
> People, awake and break thy chains!"

At ten o'clock in the evening the procession reached the Panthéon, and there the coffin was lowered reverently into its appointed place.

. . . . .

Such were the honours paid by his country to that extraordinary man, who, for half a century, had been the most remarkable figure in Europe.

If we try to measure his influence or to understand the secret of his power, we have to consider him in relation to the ideas and necessities of his period. He was not, like Rousseau, a constructive thinker. He was no prophet. He was not the preacher of a new creed, but the affirmer of the tremendous principles of common sense. In his concept of the human advance, mysticism had no part to play. He was in fixed opposition to the sentimental, the negative and the imaginary. As we understand the meaning of the terms, he was neither a poet nor an artist. It is important to remember that he had no appreciation

of music and that he hated Shakespeare. He attacked religion, not only because it was a source of persecution and depravity, but also because it represented elements of the human mind which he was totally incapable of understanding. His own particular god was a mere abstraction, a philosophic necessity, entirely without form or effective influence. If he had known of such a thing as the first law of thermodynamics, it would probably have taken the place of God altogether. It is more than likely that he called himself a deist only to strike at the Christian church from a position of advantage, or only to avoid the charge of idiocy implied by the term atheist. Nor was he in the strict sense of the word a social revolutionary. He believed it was only necessary to infuse the body social with a strong dose of rationalism in order to restore it to perfect health. The idea of a completely reorganised body never occurred to him. It was, perhaps, by virtue of his bourgeois foundation that he never wavered in his attachment to the principles of aristocracy and monarchy. Those principles appeared to him compatible with a generous and free social ordér, and even as an essential part of it.

But, if he was no revolutionary, he was certainly a reformer. He was appalled by the unholy alliance between the church and the secular power. He was appalled by the foul horrors of bigotry and persecution, by the waste of war and the misery of civil discord. He had reason to be. In his day, superstition was powerful, obstructive and cruel. The full weight of oppression is never more blindly and brutally applied than when the governed mass beneath it shows the first unequivocal sign of revolt. Nor was he alone in protesting against the Infamous. The French

Catholicism of the eighteenth century was a thing which no just man could look upon without shame and anger. There were some who viewed religious persecution with despairing laughter, and others who, like Voltaire, were stirred to magnificent fury.

He did not represent the general intellectual advance of the eighteenth century, but he represented, in an overwhelming degree, a certain aspect of that advance. His power as a social and intellectual force was due to his prodigious concentration upon a limited group of problems, not to any wide comprehension of social development. He had nothing to say on questions of education, government or finance. As far as we can judge, he knew nothing, or next to nothing, of the real condition of the people; and yet, for many years before the end of his life, an alarming number of the French people were starving to death.

A man is great, not in spite of his limitations, but because of them; because of his particular and exclusive adaptation for a given purpose. We do not say that Samuel Johnson was not a great man because he asked whether Bach was a piper; nor do we say that Voltaire was not a great man because he thought Shakespeare no better than a village clown.

If Voltaire is neither a great poet nor a great playwright, he is absolutely unapproachable in the field of satire. If there is little depth in his philosophy, he is without a rival in the sparkling brilliance of a forcible, keen dialectic. He is a master of literary form, a writer of extraordinary vigour, fluency and resource. But no analysis of a literary kind is able to reveal his immense influence upon the men of his age or to explain the wild anger of those who opposed him.

To a large extent, his influence was personal. In

a subtle yet penetrating fashion the living man impressed himself upon the minds of his period, adored by some, execrated by others, but to none indifferent.

His noble intolerance of folly, hypocrisy and superstition forced men to declare themselves either for him or against him. He saw that the one hope of society was the enlightened mind and the enlightened conscience. His opinions were not unfamilar, but no one else had expressed them with such uncompromising vehemence, or defended them with such overpowering logic. Other men had written with greater elegance, like Montesquieu, or with sounder learning, like Diderot; none had the prestige, the fire and ascendancy of Arouet de Voltaire.

In teaching men to escape from the horrors of religious intolerance, there is always the danger of leading them towards the colder horrors of rationalism, and so towards intolerance of another kind. Voltaire himself is occasionally an example of that danger. He does not see that mere rationalism is not good enough to satisfy the complex needs of humanity.

We have to remember, that a dreary materialism appeared the only means of countering the hateful tyranny of the church. To-day, with science pointing to a new concept of materialism and religion, we may be inclined to judge that view too harshly. We may even fall into the error of supposing that Voltaire has no significance for the present age. To fall into that error would be to confuse method with intention or parable with principle. Voltaire was a great man; not only because he wrote *Candide*, the *Philosophick Dictionary*, and the *Essay on Manners*, but also because he fought so gloriously for tolerance, justice, and the freedom of the human mind. No changed estimate of Voltaire as a writer need change our estimate of

Voltaire as an intellectual force; nor, until society has improved so prodigiously that it ceases to resemble society as we know it, need we imagine that we have no longer anything to learn from the vigour of his example. At present, we seem far enough from that state of happy superiority. Remember Frederick's appeal, not in mockery, to the shade of his friend:

"Divine Voltaire—*ora pro nobis.*"

THE END

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